

George Manville Fenn

"The Queen's Scarlet"

Chapter One.

Head First.

Two rooks flew over the Cathedral Close, and as they neared the old square Norman tower they cawed in a sneering way.

That was enough. Out like magic came the jackdaws from hole and corner—snapping, snarling, and barking birdily—to join in a hue and cry as they formed a pack to drive away the bucolic intruders who dared to invade the precincts sacred to daws from the beginning of architectural time; and this task over, they returned to sit on corbel, leaden spout, crevice, and ledge, to erect the feathers of their powdered heads and make remarks to one another, till the chimes rang out and the big bell boomed the hour.

"Bother Mark!" said Richard Frayne, Baronet. "If he had ten thousand a year, he'd spend twenty. I can't do it, and I won't."

Richard Frayne puckered up his brow and began reading away at Lord Wolseley's Red Book—after being interrupted by the jackdaws—trying to master the puzzling military details, but finding it impossible while his brain was full of his cousin's money troubles; and at last, in despair, he pitched the little leather-covered book aside, walked to the side-table, took his handsome flute from its case, set up a piece of music on a stand, and began to run through a few preliminary flourishes that were peculiarly bird-like in their trilling, when there was a tap at the door and Jerry Brigley thrust in his head.

"Wants to see you, sir."

"Who does?" said Richard, hurriedly putting aside his flute.

Jerry held out a card.

"Isaac Simpson, clerical and military tailor," read the young man. "What does he want with me?" Then, quickly: "Oh! of course! I know. Show him in."

A little, stoutish, smooth man, in shiny broadcloth and a profuse perspiration, entered directly after, carrying a brown leather handbag and his hat, which he took from his left finger and thumb and used to make a most deferential bow. There he stood, smiling and sleek, dabbing his face with a red silk handkerchief.

"Very hot morning, sir, and your room's a bit 'igh."

"You wanted to see me?" said Richard rather distantly.

"Well, yes, sir—begging your pardon, sir. By Mr Mark Frayne's introduction, sir. Said business was business, and I might venture to call, sir. Been Mr Mark Frayne's tailor, sir, three years come next quarter, sir; and I've ventured to bring my new patterns with me, sir."

"My cousin should have spoken to me first, Mr Simpson," said Richard, "and I could have saved you this trouble."

"Trouble, sir? Oh! dear me, no, sir! It's a pleasure to me to have the honour. You see, I almost knew you personally though before, sir: Mr Mark Frayne was always talking about you and your country place. Now, I have here, sir," said the visitor, rattling open his patterns like a card-trick, "some fashions that only come down by post this morning, sir; and I said to myself, 'Here's your opportunity. You can't expect a gentleman as has his garments from Servile Row to care about goods as every counter-jumper in Primchilsea has seen. Go and let him have the first selection.'"

"Thank you, Mr Simpson," said Richard, coldly, as he thought of his cousin and the money; "I have no reason for exchanging my tailor. Greatly obliged to you for calling."

"No trouble, sir; no trouble—a pleasure, as one may say. I thought I'd bring all the patterns as I was coming. Then shall we settle that other little bit of business, sir, at once? Some other time, p'raps, you may be able to give me a line."

"What other business?" said Richard, flushing a little.

"That little affair of the money, sir."

"I have nothing to do with Mr Mark Frayne's affairs," said Richard, warmly.

"Oh, sir, don't say that to a poor tradesman, sir!" said the tailor, shaking his head reproachfully, as he reopened the little handbag and drew a flat bill-case of large size from among the cards of patterns. "Mr Mark said if I would make it a bit easy, and drew at three, six, and nine, you would put your name to the paper, and there would be no more trouble."

"My cousin had no right to say such a thing to you!" cried Richard.

"Oh, sir, don't say that; it's such a little amount to a gentleman! I have drawn it in three bills, a hearty and two fifties—hundred and hearty! Why, it ain't worth thinking about twice for a gentleman like you! Ha, ha, ha! it's like making three bites of a cherry!"

"How much?" said Richard.

"Total, hundred and eighty-three—five—six, with the stamps, sir," said the tailor, producing three slips of blue paper.

"My cousin said he owed you only about eighty pounds!" cried Richard.

"For clothes, sir," said the tailor, with a deprecating smile. "The hundred was the cash advanced to oblige you, sir, as a gentleman."

"What!"

"The hundred I advanced for you two, Sir Richard."

"For us two? My good fellow, I had none of the money."

"Oh, sir, don't say that!" cried the tailor, reproachfully. "Of course, I know that gents wants a little money extray sometimes, and that it's a tradesman's dooty to help and oblige a customer if he can; and I did."

"But—but—"

"Don't, sir; please don't—you hurt me! I respect Mr Mark Frayne very much; but you can't know him without seeing as he's a bit too free with his money, and I should never have dreamed of letting him have it if it hadn't been for you, sir."

"It was not for me!" cried Richard, who was regularly roused and indignant now. "I have nothing whatever to do with my cousin's debts."

"Oh, sir, please don't! I have not come for the money now, though it would be very convenient, for wholesale houses objects to waiting. There you are, you see! You have only to sign the three bits of paper, and there'll be no more trouble for you at all."

"But, look here," cried Richard, angrily, "you are insinuating that I received part of this money!"

"Wouldn't it be better, Sir Richard, to say no more about it?" said the tailor. "Money is money, sir; gold's gold; and, as for silver, why it's quicksilver, ain't it, now? Of course, I know what young gents is, as I said before; and I don't want to make any trouble about it."

"But listen," said Richard, trying to be quite calm and cool. "Do I understand you aright?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I'm right about money."

"That I shared the borrowed money?"

"Why, sir," said the man with a smile, "you don't suppose I should have lent it to Mr Mark Frayne, whose father's only a poor parson? Not me!"

"Then you lent it to him because you believed I was to have part?"

"I lent it to you, sir, because I knew you was a barrynet, and would come in for your money in three or four years' time, and, of course, to oblige you—being short."

"But—"

"For I says to myself, 'There's the money a-doing nothing in the bank, and it's obliging a gent who won't be above orderin' a few garments to make up for you obliging him, and—'"

"Confound you! will you let me speak?" cried Richard angrily.

"Of course, sir. Glad to hear you speak, and sorry I come at an inconvenient time, when you were busy with your music; and—let me see—didn't Mr Mark say something about your wanting

the cash to buy a new pianner? Or was it an old fiddle? I quite forget, sir; that I do."

"Will you be silent a minute? Did my cousin say that money was for me?"

"Oh, yes, sir; or I shouldn't have—"

"Then it was a lie—an abominable lie!" cried Richard, in a rage. "Sign those papers and acknowledge that I had the money? No! So you can be off, and tell him so."

Mr Isaac Simpson screwed up his face, bent over the table, and carefully spread the three oblongs of blue paper out, one above the other, holding the ends down, and smoothing them out slowly.

"Well," cried Richard, hotly, "do you hear what I say?"

"Oh, yes, Sir Richard Frayne, Baronet, I hear what you say," replied the tailor: "but I was a-thinking, sir."

"Then go and think somewhere else."

"No, sir; I can't do that, because, you see, I'm thinking about you. Here's 'undred and eighty-odd pound of a poor man's hard-earned money, most part of which you owe me."

"It is false! I don't owe you a penny."

The tailor shook his head.

"I can't afford to lose it, Sir Richard; and you can't say but what I want to make it easy for you with them bills."

"I do not want anything made easy for me," cried the young man; "I can pay my just debts."

"And, don't you see, sir, it wouldn't be pleasant for you if I was to write to your parents and guardians—leastwise, as you have no parents, your guardians—and ask them?"

"Write to them, and so will I."

"But I don't want to do such a shabby thing about a gent as I've tried to oblige."

"I tell you I never authorised anyone to borrow money for me, sir."

"Well, Sir Richard Frayne, Baronet, there's the transaction down in a neat handwriting in my book, and I give a cheque for it, and there's the cheque as come back from the bank with your name on the back, as well as Mr Mark Frayne's on the receipt."

"What?"

"As afore said, sir; and people—I mean your lawyers and guardians—'ll believe it. They won't be so shabby as to say you were under age when they have lots of your money in trust."

Richard stared at the man, half-stunned.

"There, Sir Richard, don't let's make a fuss and a lot of unpleasantry about a trumpery little amount like that, when it is all so easy for you."

"I say I've never had the money. Go to Mr Mark Frayne."

"But don't you see as that's as good as saying he's been a-swindlin' of me? And if I goes to my lawyer and lays it all before him, he'll be for putting it in court, or p'raps worse; and it would go very hard on Mr Mark. I'm afraid they wouldn't treat it as if it were a debt; they might say—"

"Silence!"

"That's what I says, sir. His father a parson, too; and it wouldn't do Mr Draycott no good. Hadn't you better sign?"

"Without seeing my cousin first and making him explain? No. Take away your papers at once."

"To my lawyers, sir?"

Richard hesitated.

"No," he said at last. "I'll see my cousin, and bring him on to you."

"Ah! Now that's talking sensible, sir. We can settle it, of course. Why, it would be such a mad thing to go to lawyers and make expenses, and have a reg'lar trouble, when your name on three bits of paper would save both of you from unpleasantry."

"Both of us?" cried Richard.

"Well, yes, sir, perhaps; for there's no knowing what people might say. They can be tidy hard on anyone as won't pay when he can."

"That will do!" cried Richard angrily. "I have told you that I will see my cousin."

"Ve—ry good, Sir Richard," said the tailor, carefully doubling up his slips of paper. "But hadn't you better sign now, and see him after?"

"No."

"Well, sir, you know best; but if it was my case, and I hadn't had the cash, I should sign, and then go and give my cousin the howdaciousest hiding he ever had. That's better than sending him to prison and before a judge. I wish you good-morning, sir—I suppose I ought to have said Sir Richard Frayne. I shall be at home all day to-morrow, sir, a-waiting on you."

Chapter Two.

In Hot Blood.

"Yes, and you'll have to wait," cried Richard Frayne, as the door closed on the man, and he listened to the departing steps as he involuntarily crossed to the stand, picked up his flute, and rearranged the music, but only to throw it down angrily and replace his instrument.

"The scoundrel!" he cried. "Here, I must have this out at once."

He was no longer the quiet, dreamy-looking musician, but full of angry energy; and in this spirit he went straight to his cousin's room, knocked, and went in; but the place was empty.

"Seen my cousin?" he cried, as he encountered Jerry, the house servant, valet, and factotum.

"See him smoking in the garden 'arf a hour ago, S'Richard."

Richard hurried down into the extensive grounds, and came plump upon Mr Draycott, the well-known military tutor and

coach, tramping laboriously up and down one of the gravel paths, with his hands behind, giving a loud puff at every second step, for he was an enormously fat man, to whom walking was a severe trial, but a trial he persevered in from a wholesome dread that, if he neglected proper exercise, he would grow worse.

"Hullo, Frayne!" he cried, "I want to see you—" *puff*.

"Yes, sir?"

"Look here, I'm very much put out about you, Frayne—I am, indeed!"—*puff*.

"What about, sir?"

"Oh, you know"—*puff*. "Of course, I never object to my pupils having their own hobbies; but you have been carrying your musical"—*puff*—"whims to excess"—*puff*.

Richard coloured.

"I do not see why a soldier"—*puff*—"should not be a good musician, though the trumpet"—*puff*—"seems more in the way than the piano"—*puff*. "But you ought not to have gone in debt over such a matter"—*puff*.

"In debt, sir?"

"Yes. Don't repeat my words!"—*puff*. "Now, I have warned you against it!"—*puff*.

"You did, sir; but I don't understand your allusions," said Richard, though he suspected that he did.

"Then you ought to, sir!"—*puff*. "Hasn't that money-lending tailor"—*puff*—"just come from dunning you?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"There, I know all about it. Pay him off, and never get into such a hobble again"—*puff*. "Coming, my dear!"—*puff*.

Mrs Draycott, an exceedingly thin lady, was calling from the French window of the drawing-room, and the "Heavy Coach," as his pupils nicknamed him, went puffing off up to the house.

"Oh, I can't stand this!" said Richard to himself. "I must have a thorough explanation. Mark shall speak out. Why, Draycott believes it, too! That scoundrelly little tailor must have told him. Hi! Dillon, seen my cousin?"

This was to a fellow-pupil, who was coming down the garden.

"Five minutes—ten minutes—ago, going across the Close. Gone to see the river; it's getting flooded. What's the row?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing."

"But you look as if you were going to knock his head off."

"I am," cried Richard, over his shoulder, as he hurried off.

"That's right. Hit hard! Save me a lock of his hair!" shouted the youth; and then to himself: "Serve the beast right! What's he been doing now?"

Richard Frayne met a couple more of the "Heavy Coach's" pupils as he crossed the Cathedral Close, where the calm silence of the old place ought to have quelled the angry throbbing in his veins; but it had an opposite effect, and the cries of the jackdaws which clung about the mouldering tower sounded like impish derisive laughter.

"Anything the matter?" said one of the pair.

"Yes; seen my cousin?"

"Yes; he's down in the ruins, seated, like Patience on a broken monument, smoking and smiling at the river. Don't pitch him in. I say: is there a row on?"

Richard Frayne did not answer, but walked away, crossed the creek bridge, beneath which the water ran thundering as it hurried toward the river, giving indications that there must have been a heavy rainstorm in the hills twenty miles away, though all was sunshine there.

He hurried on along the lane, turned out of it, crossed a couple of fields, and made his way toward a pile of ivy-clad ruins, whose base was washed by the river, now brimful, and here and there making patches and pools in the lower meadows further on.

These ruins were the remains of one of the great ecclesiastical buildings dismantled in the days of Bluff King Hal, and still showed the importance of the edifice, with its lancet windows and high walls surrounding a green patch that was at one time an inner garden surrounded by cloisters, of which only a few columns were left, and was now as secluded and lonely a spot as could be found for miles.

A visitor would have paused directly to admire the beauty of the old place, which raised up thoughts of the past, but Richard did not stay, for to him it only raised up secular thoughts of the present, with tailors' bills, borrowed money, forgery, and lies.

But there was no sign of Mark Frayne; and, growing moment by moment more excited and angry, Richard hurried here and there, looking sharply round, coming to the conclusion that either he had been misinformed or his cousin had gone, when he caught sight of a yellow and black fragment of flannel projecting from behind a pile of stones at the corner farthest away from the swollen river.

"The cur!" he muttered, as he hurried forward, leaping over fallen blocks and fragments which showed still the groinings of the old cloisters.

"That's like you!" he cried, as he came suddenly upon Mark leaning back in a niche, and who looked first white, then scarlet. "What do you mean? Hiding, like the sneaking coward you are."

"You're an idiot! I came here to see the flood rising."

"At this end?" cried Richard, contemptuously. "No, you didn't. You hid here because you saw me coming."

"What! Hide from you!" cried Mark, defiantly. "I like that! Why should I hide from you, fiddler?"

"Because you felt what was coming out, and that I knew the miserable cheating act of which you have been guilty."

"Here! what do you mean?" cried Mark, in a bullying tone, as he edged up, scowling, towards him, and looked down upon the meek musician, whom he felt he could at any moment pretty well crush.

"I mean that if poor sick Uncle James knew what I have just heard it would break his heart."

"I don't want to hear any cant about my father," cried Mark, changing colour a little. "Tell me what you mean, or—"

He made a menacing gesture; but, to his surprise, Richard did not shrink.

"I mean that that wretched man has been to me about your debts."

"About my debts? Oh, you mean Simpson about his bill. Well, I don't want your help now. I can pay him. He must wait."

"But he will not wait. He threatens to expose you if the matter is not settled at once."

"Pooh! what is there to expose? Every fellow gets in debt more or less. Tailors have to wait. Every fellow gets behind for his togs."

"Yes; but he does not forge his cousin's name when he wants money."

"What?" roared Mark, shaken for the moment. "Here," he cried, seizing Richard by the arm, after a glance round to see if they were alone, "what does this mean?"

"It means this," cried Richard passionately, "that your creditor has been to me this morning, and has just left me, after showing me how you have disgraced the good old name of Frayne."

"I? How?"

"How?" cried Richard, whose voice was husky from emotion; "by writing my name to the cheque for the money you borrowed, telling the man it was for me."

"Well, so it was!" cried Mark, seizing him by the other shoulder and shaking him. "No backing out now!"

"What?"

"You had it nearly all. And, if it has come to this, we'll have it all out now. What do you mean about the cheque?"

"I mean that you forged my name. I knew nothing of it till just now."

"I—I—did what?" cried Mark, as if astounded.

"I have told you. Take your dirty hands off me! It is disgrace enough, without—"

"I—I put your name to a cheque!" roared Mark. "Why, you infamous, lying cad: unsay every word! You know the money was borrowed for you, and that you spent it on your miserable music! Confess it before I break every bone in your skin!"

Staggered, mentally and bodily, by his cousin's retort, Richard Frayne gave way, and was borne back against the ruined wall of the old sanctuary; for Mark had, by a quick action, seized him hard by the throat and held him fast.

"Why, you must be mad! You dare to say I did that, you infamous—lying—"

He had gone too far, and there was a moment's pause; for, before he could utter the next word, Richard Frayne had given himself a violent wrench sideways, freed himself and struck out at his assailant.

But it was a feeble blow, consequent upon his crippled position, and, with a savage laugh, Mark turned at him again.

"I'll teach you to talk like that! Down on your knees and swear that it was all a hatched-up lie, or—"

Mark Frayne's words were checked again, for he had never really seen of what his cousin was capable till now. He knew that he took part in athletic exercises, and he had had the gloves on with him often enough before, and knocked him about to his heart's content. But he had now to learn that Richard Frayne, the white-handed lover of music, fought better without gloves than with, while the soft-palmed hands had knuckles as bony as his own.

"Liar!" muttered Richard between his teeth as he struck out with his left full at Mark's mouth, sending him staggering back, but only to recover directly and come on furiously again.

There was only another round, and it was very short.

Richard Frayne, with every nerve twitching with rage and indignation, followed up his second blow with others, planted so truly, and with such effect, that within a minute he was driving his adversary back step by step, till, blind now with fury, he put

all his strength and weight into a blow which sent Mark down like a piece of wood, to lie, inert, with his head resting against the broken, lichen-covered fragment of an arch.

"Steady! Hold hard!" shouted a couple of voices, and the two young fellow-pupils, who had followed, leaped down through a broken window, from whence, hidden by the ivy, they had watched the fray.

"You second Dick Frayne," cried the first, "and I'll see to Mark."

Richard hardly heard what was said, for there was a sound as of surging waters in his ears, followed by a roar of words that seemed to thunder.

For, as the last speaker went down on one knee to raise up the fallen lad, he uttered a cry of horror, and then let the young man's head hurriedly down, to shrink away with his hands fouled by blood.

"What is it?" cried the other, running forward; while Richard's hands clutched at the air. "What is it?—cut?"

"Cut!" sobbed out the other. "A doctor!—quick! Dick Frayne, what have you done? He's dead!"

Chapter Three.

Two Paces to the Rear.

After plunging as we did head first into the great trouble of Sir Richard Frayne's life, I must ask my readers to let me go back, in military parlance, "two paces to the rear," so as to enter into a few explanations as to the position of the cousins, promising that the interpolation shall be neither tedious nor long.

Only a short time before Richard Frayne struck that unlucky blow, general-valet Jerry entered the room with—

"Here you are, Sir Richard, two pairs; and your shoes is getting thin in the sole."

"Then I must have a new pair, Jerry."

"Why don't you have 'arf dozen pairs in on account, sir, like Mr Mark do?"

"Look here, Jerry, if you worry me now, I shall throw something at you."

Jeremiah Brigley, who had just put down two pairs of newly-polished shoes, rubbed his nose meditatively with the cuff of his striped morning jacket, and then tapped an itching place on his head with the clothes-brush he held in his hand, as he stared down at the owner of the shoes—a good-looking, fair, intent lad of nearly eighteen, busy over a contrivance which rested upon a pile of mathematical and military books on the table of the well-furnished room overlooking the Cathedral Close of Primchilsea busy city.

The place was fitted up as a study, and a curtain shut off a smaller room suggestive of a bed within; while over the chimney-piece were foils opposite single-sticks; boxing-gloves hung in pairs, bruised and swollen, as if suffering from their last knocking about; a cavalry sabre and a dragoon officer's helmet were on the wall opposite the window. Books, pictures, and a statuette or two made the place attractive, and here and there were objects which told of the occupant of that room's particular aim.

For beneath the helmet and sabre stood a piano open, and with a piece of music on the stand—a movement by Chopin; a violoncello leaned in its case in one corner, a cornet-à-piston showed itself, like an arrangement in brass macaroni packed in red velvet upon a side-table; and in front of it lay open a small, flat flute-case, wherein were the two halves of a silver-keyed instrument side by side, in company with what seemed to be its young one—so exact in resemblance was the silver-mounted piccolo made to fit into the case.

There were other signs about of the occupant's love of the sweet science; for there were a tuning-fork, a pitch-pipe, and a metronome on the chimney-piece, a large musical-box on the front of the book-case, some nondescript pipes, reeds, and objects of percussion; and, to show that other tastes were cultivated to some extent, there were, besides, several golf-clubs, fishing-rods, a cricket-bat, and a gun-case.

But the owner of all sat intent upon the contrivance before him upon the table, and Jerry scratched his nose now with the edge of the clothes-brush.

"Beg pardon, S'Richard—"

"What the dickens do you want now?" cried the young man, impatiently.

"On'y wanted to 'mind you of what I said lars week, S'Richard."

"Didn't I tell you to talk to me when I wasn't busy?"

"Yes, S'Richard; but, you see, you never ain't not busy. When you ain't at your books, getting ready for the gov'nor, you're out with Mr Mark Frayne, sir, or some of the other gents; and when you are at home here, sir, you're always tunin' up, an' windin' up, or 'venting something."

"Well, there, I am, Jerry," said the young man smoothing his perplexed-looking brow. "Now, then, what is it?"

"Only this, S'Richard," said the man, eagerly, and he now had laced up the shoes he had brought in and thrust them beneath the curtain. "You see, my father he used to say as it was a chap's dooty to try and rise in the world."

"Yes, of course," said Richard Frayne, thoughtfully taking up a piece of the contrivance upon which he had been at work.

"And he said, S'Richard, as you ought to be on the look-out."

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, S'Richard, that's it; I'm on the look-out."

"What for, Jerry?"

"To better myself, S'Richard. You see, it's all very well being here valetin' for the young gents and you, S'Richard; and I s'pose, as far as character goes, there ain't a better coach nowhere than master, as they says passes more young gents than anyone."

"No; Mr Draycott is a very clever scholar, Jerry," said the young man, looking as if he wished the servant would go. "Well?"

"Well, sir, that's all very well for a character for a noo place, but a chap don't want to be cleanin' boots all his life when they ain't shoes."

"No, Jerry; that would be rather a monotonous career. But what do you want me to do?"

"Well, S'Richard, it's making very bold like; but I can't help liking you, sir, and 'fore long you'll be passing and getting appointed to your regiment; and as I've got a great taste for soljering myself, I thought I'd ask you to take me with you."

"You—you want to be a soldier, Jerry?"

"Yes, sir. Why not?" said the man, drawing himself up, and brushing the tuft of hair over the top of his forehead, so that it stood up fiercely, and gave his whole head some resemblance to the conventional naming shell of military ornamentation. "Of course, I couldn't think of a military eddication and going to a coach, S'Richard, and passing; but lots of chaps have risen from the ranks."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the young man, who looked more bored and fidgety; "but I don't think I ought to promise to take you, Jerry. I don't know that I shall pass and get my commission."

"Oh, yes, you will, sir."

"Of course, I should like to have you with me, Jerry, because you understand me so well."

"I do, S'Richard; and I allus feel proud o' doin' for you. I often watches you when you goes out, and I says to myself, 'Look at him! I cut him, and brushed him, and shaved him'—not as there's much to shave yet, sir."

"No, Jerry," said the young man, passing his hand over his upper lip and chin; "it's rather a work of supererogation at present."

"A what, sir?"

"Work of supererogation, Jerry."

"Exactly, S'Richard; that's just what it is. But don't you get out of heart, sir. I was smooth as you once, and now if I goes two days you might grate ginger with me!"

"Well, we will see," said the young man; "but if you want to—to—"

"Better myself, S'Richard; that's it!"

"Don't let another opportunity go."

"Oh, yes, I shall, S'Richard! You said you'd like to have me, and that's enough for me! I'd wait for you, sir, if I had to stop till you was a hundred! But, beg pardon, S'Richard, is that there to make a patent mouse-trap?"

"Which?" said the young man angrily.

"That there thing as you're making, S'Richard."

"Pooh! what nonsense! Jerry, you are not musical."

"Well, sir, I ain't a moosician, as you may say, but I was a dab at the Jew's-harp once, and I've got a very tidy floatina 'cordion now; only I ain't no time to practise."

"No, Jerry," said the young man, thoughtfully, as he laid out his little pieces of mechanism on the table; "this is an attempt to invent a means of producing musical sounds by percussion."

"With p'cussion-caps, sir?"

"No, no! by blows."

"Oh, I see, S'Richard."

"I have often thought that more might be done, Jerry, in the way of obtaining musical notes."

"Of course, S'Richard."

"You see," said the young man, dreamily, "we produce them by vibration."

"Yes, S'Richard, and whistling, and fiddling, and blowing trombones."

"Exactly; that is all connected with vibration."

"Oh, is it, sir? I s'pose you're right; but then there's pyanners, sir, and orgins, sir, street and otherwise!"

"Exactly, Jerry," said the young student drily. "There, I'm busy now; I'll remember what you said, and, if I can have you with me, I will."

"Thank you kindly, S'Richard. Don't you be afraid as I won't do my dooty by you!"

"I won't, Jerry. Then that's all, isn't it?"

"Well, S'Richard, not quite all; there's your cousin, sir—Mr Mark, sir."

"Well, what about him?"

"Only this, S'Richard: if you'd speak to him, and tell him as servants ain't doormats, I should be greatly obliged."

"What do you mean?"

"Only this, S'Richard, as it's getting beyond bearing! I don't want to go complaining to Mr Draycott, sir, but there is bounds to everything! Havin' all kinds of hard words chucked at you—'fools' and 'idgits' and 'jackasses'—and when it comes to boots and hair-brushes, I says as it's rough enough; but when it's a soda-water bottle and a plate, I can't stand it, and I won't!"

"What had you been doing to annoy my cousin?"

"Nothin', S'Richard. I just work for him same as I do for my other gentlemen, or for you, sir; and you never threw a bad word at me in your life—let alone boots!"

"Did the things hit you, Jerry?"

"No, S'Richard, I can't say as they hit me; but they hurt me, all the same. Servants has feelings same as gents has."

"I'm very sorry, Jerry. Mr Frayne is a little irritable sometimes."

"If you made it often, S'Richard, you wouldn't be very far out."

"Well, often then. His studies worry him, I suppose."

Jerry made a peculiar grimace.

"And he has had a little trouble once or twice with Mr Draycott."

"Yes, S'Richard, he ayve."

"There, I'll speak to him, Jerry. He doesn't mean anything by it, for he's a good fellow at heart; and when he feels that he has

hurt your feelings I daresay it will mean an apology, and—perhaps something else.”

“Thankye, S’Richard, thankye,” said the man. “I know’d you’d say something o’ that sort, but don’t you speak to him. It wouldn’t do no good. He wouldn’t ’pologise to such as me; and as to a tip—not him! There, S’Richard, it’s all right now. It did me good to say all that out to a real gentleman, and—pst!—Any more orders, S’Richard?”

“Eh?” said Richard, wondering at the man’s manner. “No, thank you; that’s all. What’s the matter?”

“Pst! S’Richard,” whispered the man hurriedly. “Talk of the No-we-never-mentions-him, and you see his—”

The door opened with a crash, and made the pictures swing upon the wall, while Jerry drew on one side to let the fresh-comer enter the room.

Chapter Four.

Mark in a Hole.

“Hullo, thick-head! loafing again.”

It was a dark, olive-complexioned young fellow, of Sir Richard’s age, who swung into the opening noisily, cigarette in mouth.

“Not loafing, Mr Frayne, sir,” said the man in an injured tone, as he fixed his eyes on the rather handsome student who had entered the room, and took in at a glance his white flannels and yellow-striped blazer, from the breast-pocket of which a thick gold chain was hanging. “Beg pardon, sir; you’ll be losing your watch-chain’s out o’ buttonhole.”

“Well, what business is it of yours, idiot? If I lose it, you might find it. Perquisites—eh, Jerry?”

“There, S’Richard,” said the man, flushing. “Now, ain’t that as good as sayin’ I’d steal a watch? I’d take my oath I never—”

“That will do, Jerry,” said Sir Richard, sternly. “You needn’t wait.—Why can’t you leave the fellow alone, Mark?”

"Why can't you act like a gentleman, and not be always making friends with the servants?" retorted the young fellow addressed. "So that's it, is it? The confounded sneak comes tattling to you, does he?"

"No!" cried Sir Richard, rather gruffly; "but he did complain of your forgetting yourself and throwing things at him."

"Oh, did he?" cried Mark Frayne, catching up the nearest thing, which was the model his cousin had been making, and hurling it at the offender, but without effect, for Jeremiah Brigley already had the door open and darted out; the panel receiving the model instead of his head.

Sir Richard Frayne sprang to his feet to save his model, but too late; it fell, shivered, to the carpet, and the new-comer burst into a roar of laughter.

"I don't see anything to grin at," said his cousin, indignantly.

"Not you!" said the other, letting himself down on to the keyboard of the piano with a loud musical crash, and laughing heartily all the time. "Why don't you get on with your work? Anyone would think you were in training for a cat-gut scraper at a low theatre instead of for an officer and a gentleman."

"Mark, old chap," said Sir Richard, good-humouredly, as, with rather a rueful look, he picked up his broken model, "every man to his taste. I like music; you like dogs."

"Yes; and they make a precious sight better music than ever you do. Soldier! Pooh! You haven't the heart of a cockroach in you. Thank goodness, you'll soon have to do your exam. That'll open your eyes, and I shall be glad of it. If I were you, I'd try for an engagement in a band somewhere, for you'll never get a commission."

"Perhaps not," said Sir Richard, quietly. "But what's the matter with you, old chap? Been having a row with Draycott?"

"Draycott's a bumptious, pedantic old fool. Fancies he knows everything. A brute!"

"Take a couple of pills, Mark; your liver's out of order."

"Put an angel's liver out of order to be here! I won't put up with much more of it, and so I'll tell him. I shall dress as I like, and do as I like, even if I haven't got a handle to my name. Sir

Richard, indeed!—a pattern for me to follow! Next time the fat old idiot say's that to me, I'll throw the books at his head."

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"Yes; that's it, is it!" cried Mark Frayne in an angry tone. "I tell you I'm sick of it!"

"Nonsense! What had you been doing?" said Richard, fighting down a feeling of resentment, and looking smilingly at his cousin.

"What's that to you?" growled Mark.

"Not much; but I wanted to help the lame dog over the stile."

"Look here," cried Mark, fiercely; "none of that. If you want to insult me, say so right out, and then I shall know what you mean. None of your covert allusions."

Richard Frayne laughed outright, and his cousin took a step forward menacingly.

"Why, what has come to you?" cried the former. "Don't be so peppery. I want to help you, if I can."

"Do you?" cried Mark, eagerly. "There, I'm sorry I spoke so sharply. That brute Simpson has been writing to Draycott."

"Simpson, the tailor? What has he got to write about?"

Mark Frayne scowled, and gave a kick out with his leg, but did not answer.

"Have you been running a bill with him?"

Mark nodded.

"Then why don't you pay it?"

"Why don't I pay it?" snarled Mark. "Am I a baronet with plenty of money?"

"No; but you have as good an allowance as I. You ought to be able to pay your tailor's bill."

"'Tisn't a bill for clothes," said Mark, sulkily, and he picked up a book, opened it, and threw it impatiently across the room, making his cousin wince a little.

"What then? Surely you haven't been such a fool as to borrow money of him?"

"Yes, I have been such a fool as to borrow money of him," cried Mark, savagely. "I couldn't help being short; he offered it to me, and, of course, I took it. So would you."

"No, I shouldn't," said Richard, quietly. "He did write to offer me money once—when I first came, and I refused it, and haven't been in his shop since."

"But then we're not all such good young men as you are, Dick," sneered Mark. "I did take it, and the brute has been running up interest and renewing, as he calls it, and gammoning me into ordering fresh clothes. He made this beastly jacket, and all sorts of things that don't fit; and now, because I'm not ready to pay his swindling bill and the wretched paper, he has been threatening, and ended by writing to old Draycott."

"Pay him then, and have done with him."

"Will you help me?"

"Of course, if I can."

"If you can! Why, you can, if you like."

"I don't know about that," said the other, good-humouredly; "I've been spending a good deal of money in music things lately."

"Bosh! you can get me out of the hole, if you like."

"How much do you owe him?"

Mark threw the end of his cigarette with all his force into the fireplace, and ground his teeth for a few moments before muttering between them—

"Eighty-four pounds, or so!"

"What?"

"Eighty-four pounds," snarled Mark. "Do you want me to shout it for everyone to know?"

"But how could you get into his debt to that extent?"

"Didn't I tell you, stupid? Half of it was lent, and I gave him an I.O.U., and he has been piling it up somehow. I don't know what he has done. He was civil and smooth as butter till he had me tight, and now he's showing his teeth."

"But he would not have written to Draycott unless you had been disagreeable to him."

"Oh! wouldn't he? He threatened to a year ago, when it wasn't so much. It was when he found out I'd been getting some togs from London. I expect he pumped it out of that idiot Jerry Brigley. But I'm not going to sit here exposing my affairs. Will you help me to get out of the hole?"

Richard Frayne was silent for a time, and then he said quietly—

"I can't, Mark."

"What? Why, you said you would."

"Yes, but I thought it meant lending you four or five pounds. I have no more till my quarter comes round."

"Till your quarter comes round," sneered Mark; "anyone would think he had his wages then. Here, no nonsense, Dick; you said you would help me."

"I did, but I can't."

Mark made an angry gesture, but he mastered himself and turned to his cousin.

"Look here, it doesn't mean money. Simpson knows that you'll have Quailmere some day, and he said he wouldn't mind waiting if he had good security. It only means putting your name to a bit of paper."

"Did Simpson suggest that?" said Richard.

"Of course he did, and it means making an end to the trouble. I shall only have to go on paying the interest."

"Till Mr Simpson chooses to come down upon me and make me pay," said Richard, with a laugh full of annoyance.

"No, he won't; he said he wouldn't. It's such a little sum, too—nothing to you! Here, come on with me at once, and let's settle it."

Richard Frayne sat back in his chair, looking straight before him, unconscious of the fact that his cousin was watching him narrowly, and who now went on with forced gaiety—

"Wish I hadn't been such a fool as to keep it to myself. Here it has been worrying my very life out for months, and made me as irritable as a wasp. You are a good fellow, Dick! But, honour bright, I didn't like to ask you."

Richard remained silent.

"There, don't think about it any more. Come on."

"But it wants thinking about, Mark."

"What nonsense! You don't know how easy these things are."

"I've often heard," said Richard, drily.

"Yes, of course you have," said Mark, with a feeble laugh. "There, put me out of my misery, old chap. Sudden death, you know. Come on."

"No," said Richard, quietly. "I promised my poor father that I would never put my name to paper in that way, and I never will."

"What?"

"You heard, Mark."

"Do you mean to tell me that, after what you have said, you will not help me out of this bit of trouble?"

"No, I do not mean to tell you that. I want to help you."

"Then, come on."

"Yes, come on to Mr Draycott, and let's ask him what is to be done."

Mark Frayne leaped up from where he had rested in a sitting position upon the keyboard of the piano, giving his hands a bang down on either side, and producing fresh jangling discords, which seemed to fit with the harsh, mocking laugh he uttered.

"Good boy!" he cried. "What an excellent son! That old cock-o'-wax, the Admirable Crichton, was nowhere. You'd have beaten him into fits, Dick. Go on, say something else; it does me good; only be gentle. I couldn't bear to be made such a saint as you are all at once."

"Of course, I know it will be very painful for you," continued Richard, gravely; "but it is the only thing you can do, and Draycott has over and over again said to me, 'If ever you find yourself in any trouble, Frayne, forget that we are tutor and pupil, and come to me as a friend.'"

"You miserable sneak!" growled Mark, in a hard, husky voice.

"No, I'm not; I'm your cousin, and I want to help you, Mark," said Richard. "I spend so much time at the music that I know very little about these money matters; but I do know that this fellow Simpson has been working to get you under his thumb, and running up an account twice as much as you justly owe him."

"Go on," said Mark, "preach away! I won't quarrel with you; because, prig as you are, Dick, I don't believe you will refuse to help me. Look here, it's only signing your name. Will you do it?"

"I'll give you all I've got, and undertake to let you have three-quarters of my next allowance from the lawyers. I can't do any more than that."

"Once more," said Mark, huskily, "will you help me?"

"I have told you," was the reply, "I'll lend you all I can scrape together, or go with you straight to Mr Draycott."

"Once more," said Mark, with an ugly, vicious look in his eyes, "will you come in to old Simpson's and sign?"

Richard Frayne sat looking firmly at his cousin, but made no reply.

"All right," said Mark, with a laugh; "then the game's up! I shall make a bolt of it, and go to sea. No: every cad does that. I'll

take my dearly beloved, sanctified cousin for a model, and be very good and saving. I won't waste all old Draycott's military teaching; it would be a pity!"

"What do you mean?" cried Richard.

"To go over to Ratcham and take the shilling. Perhaps I shall rise from the ranks."

"Go and think about what I've said, and come back when you get cool. I won't go out all day, and—"

Bang, rattle, and a crash!

Mark Frayne had gone out and closed the door with so much violence that the dragoon officer's helmet was shaken from the peg upon which it hung, and fell, bringing with it the cavalry sabre.

Richard sprang from his chair to pick them up, a frown gathering upon his face as he saw that an ugly dint had been made in the helmet which resisted all his efforts to force it out.

Then he stood gazing down at it and the sabre, which he had raised and carefully laid upon the table beneath where it had hung.

It was a fancy, he knew. He told himself that it was a silly piece of superstition; but, all the same, a strange feeling troubled him; and it seemed as if the fall of these old mementoes of the gallant officer, his dead father, was a kind of portent of trouble to come—trouble and disaster that would be brought about by his cousin.

Chapter Five.

Right Forward.

The dreamy sensation of unreality passed away for the moment, and Richard Frayne flung himself upon his knees beside his cousin, to raise his head, after hurriedly taking out and folding a handkerchief to form a bandage; while, after eagerly watching him for a few moments, one of the two pupils turned and dashed off as hard as he could run in the direction of the town.

But the bandage was too short; and, after looking wildly up at his companion, Richard tore off his necktie, made a pad of the handkerchief, and bound it firmly to the back of his cousin's head, conscious, as he did so, of the fact that the bone was dented in by its contact with the stone.

"Go for help!" cried Richard, huskily.

"No, no; I can't leave you now," said the other, who stood there, white and trembling. "Andrews has gone for a doctor. Somebody else is sure to come. Oh, Frayne! what have you done?"

The lad looked up at him wildly, but he could not speak. The strange sensation of everything being unreal came over him again, and, in a dreamy way, he saw the coming of his aunt and uncle to ask him the same question; while Mark was lying, pale and cold, lifeless in his room. There was the rushing, murmuring sound of the river from close at hand, and the deep tones of the great Cathedral bell striking the hour; but to Richard's excited imagination it was tolling for his cousin's death, and thought succeeded thought now in horrible sequence.

He had in his passion killed Mark Frayne. It was in fair fight; but would people believe all this? They had quarrelled, and about that money trouble. Would people believe his version, or take the side of the dead?

Then a black cloud of misery and despair seemed to close him in, and he knelt there as it stunned—unable to think, unable to move. He could only gaze down at the pale, rigid features before him, drawing back involuntarily at last as he awoke to the fact that his companion had been down to the river to fill his hat with water, with which he began to bathe Mark Frayne's face.

Then came a buzz of voices as boys and men approached. Two or three people began at once to ask questions, which Richard Frayne could not answer, while his companion's replies were confused and wild.

"Yes, he's dead enough," said someone, coarsely, and the words seemed to echo through Richard's brain.

Then there was hurried talk about carrying him back to the town, calls for a gate or a shutter, and the little crowd constantly on the increase, till the pressure grew suffocating.

At last someone shouted—

"Here he is!" and Richard was conscious of a tall figure in black forcing its way through the crowd, scolding and ordering the people to keep back.

"How did this happen?" someone said, sharply; and Richard gazed up at the speaker, but made no reply, only stared with dilated eyes as a rapid examination was made and the rough bandage replaced.

Then, in a dreamy way, Richard Frayne saw that his cousin was lifted on to a gate, and a ragged kind of procession was formed, as the men who had raised the bars on to their shoulders stepped off together under the doctor's direction; while he seemed to be, as the nearest relative, playing the part of chief mourner.

That march back appeared endless. People joined in, others stood in front of house and shop; and the buzzing of voices increased till, panting and flurried, the great heavy figure of Mr Draycott was seen approaching without his hat.

"Much hurt?"

"Can't say yet, for certain," rang ominously in Richard's ears. "Fear the worst! I want Mr Shrubsole to be fetched!"

"I'll go, sir; I'll go!" came from a couple of boys; and then Richard felt Mr Draycott's heavy hand upon his shoulder as they still went on.

"A terrible business, Frayne; a terrible business!" he said; and for the rest of the distance to the gate of the carriage drive these words kept on repeating themselves to the beat of feet and the buzz and angry excitement, as one of the policemen who had hurried up refused to let the crowd follow to the hall-door.

Then, still in the dreamy, confused way as of one half-stunned, Richard Frayne paced up and down the dining-room, hearing from time to time what was going on, for he had been sent out of his cousin's room by the doctor. Here he was conscious of the fact that his fellow-pupils all kept aloof, grouping together and talking in low tones. They were discussing the affray, he knew, and a word here and there told him that the causes of the encounter were well to the fore.

Twice over he heard something which made him draw near, but his approach was followed by a dead silence, and the blood flushed to his temples; but that was no time for angry remonstrance, and he shrank away.

"They don't know!" he muttered, as he resumed his weary walk up and down till Andrews, who acted the part of scout, entered the room to communicate what he had gathered on the stairs.

Richard went to him, but the lad avoided his eyes and turned to his companions, to whom he whispered a few words, and then went out again to get more news.

This went on over and over again, with the feeling growing on Richard that he was to be "sent to Coventry," the two who had witnessed the encounter having evidently heard a great deal that passed between the cousins and communicated the words that had fallen at the time.

All this was maddening, but it was overborne by the one dread thought—Suppose Mark really were dead, what should he do?

The leaden minutes went slowly on, and somehow he gathered that the two doctors had been performing a crucial operation and one of them had gone; and, unable to bear the suspense longer, Richard turned to go and ask for himself, when the door was opened and Jerry appeared, to raise his hand and beckon to him to come out.

Richard obeyed the sign, and hurried into the hall in the midst of a profound silence.

"How is he?" whispered the lad, excitedly; and the man shook his head.

"Don't ask me, sir," he cried. "Master wants to see you in the study."

Richard uttered a low, piteous sigh, and everything seemed to swing round him, while an intense desire came to rush wildly out of the house and hurry away anywhere—to woods, or out on some vast plain, where he would be alone to think, if it were possible, and get rid of the violent throbbing in his brain.

"Oh, I shall go mad!" he muttered.

At that moment Jerry threw open the study door, and, trying to nerve himself for the encounter, Richard entered, to find the

great tutor standing, with his hands behind him, before the fireless grate.

"How is he, Mr Draycott? Pray, pray speak!" cried Richard.

"I sent for you to tell you, Frayne," said the tutor, in a low, deep voice. "Sinking fast!"

"Dying?" cried Richard, wildly. "No, no, sir; don't say that!"

"The doctors have done all they can, Frayne. He is perfectly insensible, and they say he will pass away before many hours are gone."

Richard groaned, and clapped his hands to his head, pressing them there as if to clear his brain.

"More help!" he said suddenly.

"I have telegraphed for our greatest specialist."

"Ah!"

"And to the poor fellow's father at Cannes. A terrible business, Frayne—a terrible business!"

"Yes; but he must not die—he must not die!"

Mr Draycott was silent for a few minutes. There was much he wanted to say, but the words seemed loth to come.

"We must be prepared for the worst, Frayne," he said at last. "This is a dreadful shock."

"Yes—yes!" groaned Richard.

"And I have something very hard to say to you."

"You cannot say anything, sir, that will make me feel worse than I do."

Mr Draycott shook his head.

"It must come, Frayne," he said at last; "so we may as well get the matter over. Things look very black against you."

"Black, sir?"

"Yes. Sinjohn and Andrews both saw how strange you looked when you passed them, and they followed, being agreed that something was wrong. It was observed too, by others."

"I was angry, sir—in a rage."

"Yes," said the tutor sternly. "They saw you encounter your cousin, and they heard nearly every word he said."

"And what I said, sir?"

"No. They tell me you spoke to him in a low voice, as if you were begging him not to do something, and they gathered that it was about keeping a trouble quiet."

"No, no, sir!" cried Richard wildly.

"That is how it impressed them, and they say that, when your cousin refused what you wanted, you attacked him."

"No, sir! We fought; but I acted in self-defence."

"Indeed!" said his tutor, coldly. "They heard words, too, about debt—a heavy sum—and forging—matters that should not be even known amongst the gentlemen studying here. I find, too, Frayne, that you have been mixed up with money matters."

"It is not true, sir."

"Your cousin declared you were. He was heard to say so, and if the worst comes to the worst, Frayne, his words will be believed."

"Do you mean if he dies, sir?" gasped Richard.

"I do, Frayne. I have had a letter from that Mr Simpson, and I find that he came to you this morning to be paid, and that sharp words passed between you in your room. This is all very bad, Frayne, and, confused though it is, it goes against you. The police—"

"What?" cried Richard.

"Were for arresting you at once."

"Arresting me? What for?" cried the young man, indignantly.

"For a murderous assault upon your cousin; but I would not hear of it now. I said that you would be here if it was found necessary to proceed against you."

"Oh, but this is madness, sir!" cried Richard, excitedly. "They could not do that!"

The tutor shook his head.

"We must look troubles in the face, Frayne," he said. "If matters come to the worst, there must be an inquest, and, whatever you may say, your fellow-pupils' words will have weight."

Richard literally staggered, and gazed wildly at the heavy face of his tutor, who went on slowly—

"It is a terrible business, Frayne, and a fearful blow for me. I cannot blame myself. I always treat those who study with me as gentlemen, and if the poor fellow upstairs does sink, the consequences must be crushing for you."

"Never mind me, sir; let's think of my cousin. He must get better! There, I can think more clearly now. It is as if my head does not feel so shut up and strange. I won't try to defend myself, sir; but Andrews and Sinjohn are wrong. I am innocent."

"But you struck your cousin down."

"Yes, sir; I was nearly mad with passion."

"Ah!" sighed the tutor.

"But it was in fair fighting, sir!"

"I am afraid, Frayne, it is manslaughter; and now let us bring this painful interview to a close. You will have the goodness to go up to your room, and to stay there until I ask you to come down. Stop! I think it would be better for you to have legal advice. This is all so new to me!"

"I'm going to my room—to stay there, sir—but don't do anything about me till we hear what the great doctor says; it may not be so bad. Can I see my cousin now?"

"No. The doctor's orders are that no one but the nurse is to enter his room. There, let us end this painful interview."

"I am innocent, sir, indeed!" it was upon Richard's lips to say; but the stern, doubting look on the tutor's face checked him, and he went slowly up to his room, utterly crushed as he sank into a chair, conscious the next moment that the curtain which separated it from his bedchamber was pushed aside, and Jerry appeared.

"Been a-waiting, sir. They're a-saying, sir, that you tried to kill Mr Mark Frayne because he was going to tell on you about some money troubles. It ain't true, is it, sir?"

"True!" cried Richard, flushing indignantly.

"I knowed it wasn't!" said Jerry, triumphantly. "You couldn't ha' done such a thing, S'Richard; but I wouldn't ha' believed as you could hit so hard."

"Go now, please."

"Yes, sir, just a-going; but don't you take on, sir. P'raps he'll get better; but, if he don't—well, sir, he's your cousin, but—"

"That will do; now go."

Jerry gave his mouth a slap, and hurried from the room.

Chapter Six.

Down in the Depths.

Half-mad with despair and misery, one thought constantly returned with terrible persistence to Richard Frayne as he tramped up and down his prison—for so it now seemed, though neither locks nor bars stayed his way to freedom. The pleasant, handsomely-furnished room was the same as it had been only a few hours before, with musical instruments and treasured hobbies that he had collected together; and yet not the same, for it was the cell in which he was confined by the order of the man whose word had always been to him as a law, and in which he felt as firmly shut in as if he had given his parole of honour not to leave it until told to descend.

The thirst for news was again rising. Mark, they had informed him, was lying insensible, slowly sinking into eternity, and he could not go to his side, fall upon his knees, and tell him that he

would sooner have suffered death than this should have happened. And there, crushing him down, as his eyes were constantly turned upon that helmet, while he tramped the room or sank upon one of the chairs, was the thought, with its maddening persistency, that it was better that his parents had not lived to see their son's position—the shame and despair which were now his lot—always that thought; for he recalled the days of sorrow, a couple of years back, when the gallant officer, whose name had been a power in India, was snatched away, and the loving wife and mother followed him within a month.

Light-hearted, of an affectionate nature, and always on the warmest terms of intimacy with his fellow-pupils, his position now seemed to him doubly hard in his loneliness, for not one had come near him to take him by the hand. The words raved out in the quarrel had run through them and hardened all against him. They could have sympathised with him in the terrible result of the encounter; but the dishonourable, criminal act which his cousin's charge had fixed upon him soured all, and they readily obeyed the principal's wish that he should be left to himself.

There were times when it seemed impossible to him that the charge he had made should so have recoiled and fixed itself upon him; but, by a strange perverseness, thus it was, and, saving by the servant, hardly a friendly word had been spoken.

"Am I going mad?" he muttered, as he tramped up and down, holding his throbbing head. "It seems more than I can bear!"

It was evening now, a glorious summer evening; with the mellow sunshine lighting up the lake-like meadows, for the river was far out of bounds and spreading still; but Richard Frayne saw nothing through the black cloud which seemed to shut him in. Then all at once, sending an electric thrill through him, there was a sharp tap at the door, and he turned to meet the visitor.

Only Jerry, who came in bearing a napkin-covered tray, holding it resting upon the edge as he cleared a space upon the table.

"Well?" cried Richard, hoarsely.

"Your dinner, sir, that I was to bring up."

"How is he? How is he?" panted Richard.

The man looked at him sadly, shook his head, and went on clearing a place for the tray.

"Why don't you speak?" cried Richard, fiercely. "Not—not—?"

He could not finish.

"No, sir; and the big doctor hasn't got here yet. There you are, sir. Now do sit down and eat a bit; you must want something!"

"Take it away!"

"No, no, sir; do, please, try!"

"Take it away, I tell you!"

Jerry stood looking at him piteously, rubbing his hands one over the other as if he were washing them.

"I know it goes agin' you, sir, of course; but you ought, sir; indeed, you ought!"

"Tell me," cried Richard, "who is with him?"

"The doctor, sir, and the nurse; and master's always going up and down. I met him only just now that upset and white it gave me quite a turn. He shook his head at me. 'A terrible business, Brigley, very!' he says; 'a terrible business! I wouldn't have had it happen for a thousand pounds!'"

"There, go away now, Jerry! Pray, pray, don't stop! Take all that down!"

"No, sir; I can't do that!" said the man. "It was master's orders, and you must really try to eat."

Richard sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands, but only sprang up the next minute upon feeling his shoulder touched, and saw the man leaning over him.

"Can't I do nothing for you, S'Richard?" whispered Jerry. "I'd do anything for you, sir; indeed, I would."

"Go to my cousin's room and wait till you can get some news. Jerry, if it comes to the worst, I shall go mad."

The man looked at him compassionately, and then went out on tiptoe, to return after an interval to thrust in his head, which he gave a mournful shake, and then withdrew.

The evening passed and the night was gliding on, with Richard still pacing the room from time to time, when Jerry once more came to the door, glided in, closed it, and hurriedly whispered—

"The doctor's down from London, sir, and he's still in Mr Mark's room."

"What does he say?" cried Richard, wildly.

"Can't tell yet, sir; but as soon as ever I hear I'll come back."

Jerry crept away, and the prisoner sat down once more to think. He felt that he would soon know now—that he would shortly have to face the awful truth—and a chilling feeling of despair came upon him with redoubled violence; while, as he sat there, he gave up all hope. There was the future to face, and now a great change seemed to come over him, as if it were the energy begotten of despair.

There was the worst to face, with the inquest, the examination, and the possibility of the wrong construction still being placed upon his acts. Everything had gone against him, everything would continue to go against him, and he told himself that it was impossible to face it. His word seemed to go for nothing; and, yielding to the horror of his position, he sat there in the darkest part of his room, wishing earnestly that he could exchange places with the unhappy lad lying yonder between life and death.

Suddenly he started, for, sounding solemn and strange in the midnight air, the bell of the Cathedral boomed out the hour, the long-drawn strokes of the hammer seeming as if they would never come to an end; while, when the last stroke fell, it was succeeded in the silence of the night by a dull, quivering vibration that slowly died away.

And there, with overstrained nerves, Richard Frayne sat, waiting still for the coming of the news. He must have that, he told himself, before he could act; but still it did not come.

Twice over he went to the door, with the intention of opening it to listen, but he shrank away.

No. He felt that he was a prisoner, and he could not lay a hand upon the lock. He would wait until the man came.

But it was half-past one before the door was opened and Jerry stole in on tiptoe.

"Think I wasn't a-coming, sir?" he said, sadly.

"The news!—the news!" gasped Richard.

Jerry was silent, as he stood gazing wistfully at the inquirer.

"Can't you see that I am dying to hear?" cried the lad imploringly.

"Yes, sir," came in a broken voice; "but I've got that to tell you that'll break your 'art as well, sir."

"Then it is the worst?" groaned Richard.

"Yes, sir: master told me. He rang for me to tell me as soon as the doctor had gone to the hotel. I let him out, sir. Yes, sir, master rung for me to tell me; and, of course, he meant it so that I might come up and tell you. 'Brigley,' he says, 'the doctor gives us no hope at all. There was a piece of bone pressing on the brain, he says, and this the doctors removed; but the shock was too much for the poor fellow, and he won't last the night.'"

Richard sat back in his chair, rigid, as if cut in stone, and Jerry went on—

"Don't look like that, sir; don't, please! You wanted me to tell you. It was my dooty, sir; and now, sir, you know the worst, do take a bit of advice, sir. Even if you don't undress, go and lie down, and have a good sleep till morning. There, sir, I must, too. I'll bring you a cup of tea about six, sir. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night," said Richard, quietly.

"Ah, that's better," said Jerry to himself. "Now he knows the worst, he's easier like. What's o'clock?"

He drew a big-faced watch from his pocket by its steel chain.

"Harpus one; not much time for my snooze. I'll just go and make up cook's fire, put the kettle over, and have a nap there. It's no use to go to bed now."

Jerry did as he had promised to himself, and finally sank back in a kind of Windsor chair, dropping off to sleep the next instant, and, by force of habit, waking just at the time he had arranged in his mind.

"Ten minutes to six," he muttered, smiling. "I've got a head like a 'larum. Just upon the boil, too," he added, addressing the kettle, as he changed it from the trivet on to the glowing coals.

The clocks were striking six as he went softly upstairs with a little tray, and, turning the handle, entered Richard Frayne's room, where one of the windows was open; and all looked bright and cheery in the early morning sunshine as he set the tray down upon the table beside the larger one, which showed that some bread had been broken off, but the rest of the contents were untouched.

"It's a shame to wake him," thought Jerry; "cup o' tea's a fine thing when you're tired out, but a good long sleep's a deal better. Poor chap, I won't disturb him, but I'll take the tea in and put it on a chair by his bedside. He shall see as I didn't forget him in trouble. On'y to think him a real gent with a handle to his name and lots of money to come in for when he's one-and-twenty. Right as a trivet yes'day morning and now in such a hobble as this, just like any common chap as goes and kills his mate. They can't hang him, but I s'pose they'll give it to him pretty hot, poor chap! Juries is such beasts, they'd take 'n give it to him hard because he's a real gent, and make as though keeping up the glorious constitootion and freedom and liberty of the subject to everybody alike. Well, I s'pose it's right, but I'd let him off in a minute if I was the judge.—Come on!"

This was to the tea, whose fragrance he sniffed as he neared the waiter, and went softly to the archway where the curtain shut off the bedroom.

"Poor boy!—for he is nothing but a boy—I am sorry for him, and no mistake. Well, ups and downs in life we see, and you can't escape troubles, even if you're a Prince o' Wales."

Jerry softly drew the curtain aside and peered through without a sound; and as he let the heavy drapery fall, he uttered an ejaculation, put the tray on the washstand, and swung the heavy curtains right along the brass pole, making the rings give quite a clash, as the morning sun shone through, showing that the bed had not been disturbed.

In an instant the man's eyes were searching about the room, and he saw that a suit of clothes lay where they had been tossed upon a chair, while a wardrobe door was open.

He darted to that, made a hasty examination, and muttered—

"Brown velveteens! No, it ain't. Here they are. It's his dark tweeds, and—no—yes: dark stockings."

He continued his examination in the bedroom, but could make out nothing else.

"Only gone for a walk before anyone's up, poor chap! Hadn't the heart to go to bed. More hadn't I at the time. He ain't taken nothing. He can't have—he wouldn't have—I don't know though—I—oh, he couldn't have—Let's see—"

He hurried downstairs and went to the front door, then to the dining-room, drawing-room, and study, as well as the room set apart for the pupils; but the windows were closed, and he went slowly upstairs again to pause by the staircase window.

"A man might step out here on to the balcony and shut it down again, and easily drop. But no: he can't have done that."

With his mind bent upon getting some clue as to the young man's actions, Jerry turned back to his room and once more looked round.

"No," he said thoughtfully, "he couldn't do that; it would be cowardly, and he's got too much pluck. He'd have taken some things, too and he hasn't done that."

As Jerry spoke his eyes were turning everywhere in search of a clue; but he saw nothing till they fell upon the tray, toward which he sprang with a cry, for he had now caught sight of a piece of paper folded like a note and bearing his name.

He tore it open, and read only these words:—

"Good-bye, Jerry. You were the only one to stand by me to the last. Take my gold fox-head pin for yourself. I cannot face it all. I feel half-mad."

Chapter Seven.

Jerry sees the worst.

"Off his nut!" gasped Jerry, excitedly. "Who wants his fox-pin? I wants him. Couldn't stand it!—half-dotty!"

He looked wildly round, and then his eyes lit upon the glittering waters of the swollen river spreading far and near, and he once more uttered a cry.

"The river!" he exclaimed. "It's that!" and, rushing out of the room, he leaped headlong down the stairs, making for the pantry, where he caught up his hat.

The next minute he was running along the main road, instinctively feeling that this was the way anyone would take who wished to reach the river.

He did not meet a soul for the first few hundred yards, and then came suddenly, at a turn, upon a farmer's man, in long smock-frock, driving a flock of sheep, and looking as if he had come far along the dusty road, perhaps travelling since daylight.

"Meet a young gent in dark-grey soot and brown billycock hat?" panted Jerry.

"Ay! Two mile along the road."

"Which way was he going?"

"Simmed to be making for lower lane; but it's all under water, and he'll have to go round."

"All under water!" muttered Jerry, as he ran on rapidly. "Two miles—and me sitting sleeping there like a pig. That's it—that's what he meant! What did he say?—'Couldn't face it?' If I could only get there in time! He must have been cracked! He must have been mad! He's gone to drown hisself and get out of his misery, just like the high-sperretted gent he is. I know: gents don't think like we do. It's the Latin and Greek makes 'em classic and honourable, and they'd sooner die than get a bad name. It's all right, I suppose; but it seems stoopid to me, when you know you ain't done nothing wrong."

"Now, let me see," thought Jerry. "I say he's come this road, because he wouldn't go and chuck hisself in the river up by the ruins, because he'd have had enough o' them; so he's come down here this way, and he's found it ain't so easy as he thought; for you can't get to the water for far enough, if you want a good deep place. Chap can't go and drown hisself in fields where it's only six inches deep, without he goes and lies down in a ditch. Gent couldn't do that. Be like dying dog-fashion! I know what he's gone to do: he's made for Brailey Bridge, where he could go over into a deep hole at once. Only

wish I was alongside of him; I'd say something as would bring him to his senses."

And as Jerry trotted on, he passed turning after turning leading to fords or down by the river, for the simple reason that, during the night, the waters had come swirling down at such a rate that the whole of the river meadows were widely flooded; but it meant his getting more rapidly to Brailey Bridge, a couple of miles from the town, for he was forced into avoiding the winding low road, which followed the curves and doublings back of the river, and making short cuts, which brought him at last, breathless and panting, in sight of something which made him stare and, for the moment, forget his mission.

For, as he trotted on, he obtained a glimpse of the rushing, foaming river tearing away, pretty well now beneath its banks, which were high at the spot where the bridge, an antique wooden structure, had spanned it with its clumsy piles. The great double wedge-shaped pier of oak timbers, rotten and blackened with age, and which had supported the roadway as it divided the river in two, was gone, and the remains of the bridge were gradually being torn away.

Jerry drew his breath hard, and his throat felt dry, as he ran nearer, descending the slope towards where the road ended suddenly, and thinking of how the spot he approached was exactly such an one as would tempt a half-maddened person to run right on, make one desperate plunge into the muddy flood, and then and there be swept away.

He paused at last, standing in a dangerous place, at the very edge of the broken bridge, gazing down into the hurrying waters, which hissed and gurgled beneath him, lapping at the slimy piles which remained; and, hot and dripping with perspiration as he was, he shivered, and felt as if icy hands were touching him as he wiped his brow.

"It's too horrid! too horrid!" he groaned, in the full belief that he was standing right on the place from which Richard Frayne had taken a desperate plunge. "Why, a score of his chums had better have died than him! I didn't ought never to ha' left him last night, seeing what a state he was in. You might ha' saved his life, Jerry, and done more good than you'll ever do blacking boots and brushing clothes, if yer lives to a hundred and ten."

He looked wildly to the right, and saw that the pollard willows were rising just out of the water, like heads with the hair standing on end. There were great patches of fresh hay floating

swiftly down, and, closer at hand, something white rolling over and over, and he shuddered; but it was only the carcase of a drowned sheep, one of several more which had probably been surrounded in some meadow and swept away. Directly after, lowing dismally, and swimming hard to save itself, a bullock came down rapidly, with its muzzle and a narrow line of backbone alone showing above the surface.

But Jerry knew well enough that no boat could live in the rushing water which swirled along; and, unless the poor beast could swim into some eddy and manage to get ashore, its fate was sealed.

The man's eyes followed the animal as it passed by the broken bridge and was swept on more rapidly downward as soon as it was below.

"I came too late—I came too late!" groaned Jerry, as he still watched the bullock, his eyes at the same time noting how the river had passed over the bank on the other side and spread along meadows, and how it was threatening to lap over the road which ran upon his side away down to the mill, where the weir crossed the river and the eel-bucks stood in a row between the piles.

"Yes, I've come too late, and I shall see that poor brute sink directly. Shall I go on down by the mill?"

He shook his head. The bullock was going faster than he could have walked, and, if anyone had plunged into the river from where he stood, he must have been swept miles away in his journey onward to the sea.

"And we shall never find him!" he muttered. "Gone! gone!"

He was going to say "Gone!" again—for the third time—but a hoarse utterance escaped his lips instead, and he made a sudden movement to climb over the rail and let himself down into the narrow cross-road which ran to the mill.

But, as he grasped the open fence, all power of action left him, and he stood, as if paralysed, staring at that which had caught his eye.

There, far away toward the mill, dwarfed by distance, but clearly seen in the bright morning air, a figure had started up, run for a few yards along the bank, and suddenly plunged in the flooded river. Jerry saw the splashed water glitter in the

sunshine and then, indistinctly, a head reappear and remain in sight for some few minutes as its owner floated or swam. Then a curve of the river hid it from his sight, and he recovered his power of action again. Climbing the rail, he scrambled down the side of the raised roadway, reached the bank, and started running.

It was a mile to the mill, and in how many minutes Jerry covered the distance he never knew, but he pulled up short in the mill-yard, to find that he could go no farther; for the waters were well out beyond, and went swinging round a curve at a terrific rate, the river being narrowed here by the piers, buttresses, and piles upon which the mill-buildings had been reared. The tops of the pier-piles showed in two places, but that was all, and, though he climbed up the ladder leading to a whitened door in the side of the building, he could see nothing but the waste of hurrying water gleaming in the sunshine, and felt that the building was quivering from the pressure of the flood.

Jerry clung to the handle of the door at the top of the steps, and the flour came off white upon his Oxford mixture coat as he turned dizzy and sick in his hurry and despair, for he knew that the figure he had seen must be that of Richard Frayne, and he had come too late!

"He must have seen me," groaned Jerry; "and just as he was hesitating he thought I'd come to drag him back, and he went in. Nothing couldn't save him, and I seem to have drove him to his end."

In his own mind he wanted no endorsement of the correctness of his idea. He had been sure that Richard had taken this route when he started from the house; he had seen him; and it was all over.

But the endorsement came, for just then, heard above the rushing of the river along the back-water and beneath the mill, where the huge revolving wheel worked, came a loud "Ahoy!"

Turning quickly, Jerry saw, from his coign of vantage, the white figure of the miller coming quickly down the road, waving his arms as if he had once owned a wind-mill instead of a water-mill, and was imitating the action of the sails.

"Hoi! come down from there," bawled the big, bluff fellow, as he came within hearing. "'Tain't safe! I made all my people clear

out last night, and 'spected to see it gone by mornin'. Oh, it's you, Mister Brigley. Looking for your young gent?"

"Yes! Seen him?" cried Jerry wildly.

"Ay, bit ago, when I were down before. He'd come down to see if the mill was safe, I s'pose."

"But—it was—our young gent?"

"I say, don't look so scared," cried the miller, good-humouredly. "I didn't mean to frighten you; but I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the old place comes toppling down; and it will, if the water rises much more. You're safe enough here."

"But, tell me," panted Jerry, who did not want telling, "it was our young gent?"

"Ay, him as come fishing with the others, and sat out on the weir yonder, tootling on that little pipe of his? Here! what's the matter with you, man?"

"A boat! a boat!" gasped Jerry.

"A boat! what for? Mine's got a plank out of it, and, if it hadn't, you couldn't use it now."

"But he's gone down! I see him jump in!"

"What!" yelled the miller, seizing Jerry excitedly by the collar. "Nonsense! He's gone back by now."

"I—I was on the bridge."

"There ain't no bridge!" growled the miller: "swep' away."

"But I was over yonder—saw him jump in."

"You did?"

"Yes, and came here fast as I could."

The miller turned to look down the rushing river, and took off his white felt hat, drew out a red cotton handkerchief, and began to mop his wet brow.

"Then Heaven have mercy on him, poor lad! for he'll never get to shore alive."

"But he could swim," said Jerry, feebly.

"Swim? Who's to swim in water like that? Never! I saw a whole drove of sheep go down this morning, and a half a dozen bullocks. The river's too much for them as can swim."

"But—but—"

"But—but, man. Ah! what was he doing to jump in?"

"Haven't you heard?" groaned Jerry, speaking to the miller, and staring wildly down stream the while. "He got into dreadful trouble yesterday. Killed his cousin!"

"What?"

"Come down here to end hisself, I s'pose!"

"Then he's done it, poor lad!" said the miller, solemnly.

"But couldn't we do nothing? Couldn't we try and help him?" whined Jerry, piteously.

"No, my lad, not with the water rooshing down like this; it's beyond human work, and—Hi! run—run!"

He caught at Jerry again, and the two men started to run for a few yards, then turned to look back, as, after several warning cracks, the whole of the great white timber-built mill literally crumbled down over its undermined foundations and disappeared in the surging waters.

"I knowed it!" panted the miller. "Poor old place! I've spent many a happy year there. Well, I come in time to save your life, squire."

"And I come to try and save his, but not in time," groaned Jerry. "Oh, my poor dear lad!" he continued, as he leaned his arm against a tree and bent his head upon it to weep aloud, "you were the master, and I'm only a servant, but I'd ha' most give my life to ha' saved yours, that I would. Yes!" he cried, fiercely, now in a wild, hysterical voice; "it would ha' been better if you, too, hadn't come in time!"

Chapter Eight.

Another Turn of the Wheel.

As if heartily ashamed of his weakness, Jerry suddenly straightened himself up, and turned angrily upon the miller.

"Don't you never go and say you saw me making such a fool of myself!" he cried.

The man shook his head.

"Think it's any good to go up to the town for a boat?"

"If you want to drown yourself," was the reply. "I wouldn't trust myself in no boat till the water goes down. I shouldn't mind the rowing down; but you'd never know where you'd got to, and be capsized on a willow stump, or against some hedge, before you had gone a mile."

"But we might find him," said Jerry, looking piteous once more.

"Ay, you might find him, my lad. There's no knowing."

"But you think we should not?"

"Sure of it!"

Jerry turned away without a word, leaving the miller staring blankly at the spot where the old place had stood, and hurried back toward the town.

"Past seven!" he muttered, "and all those boots and shoes waiting. Breakfast'll have to be late."

It sounded strange, but it was quite natural for him to mix up his daily work with this business; and upon reaching the house, as if feeling satisfied that there was no more to be done, he hurried about over his valeting, beginning with Mr Draycott, but found that he was not in his room.

The tutor came, though, five minutes later, and, meeting his man, exclaimed with animation:

"Better news, Brigley."

"No, sir," said Jerry, shaking his head. "Worse—much worse!"

"How dare you, sir?" cried the tutor, irritable from a sleepless night. "I tell you the news is better, and we have hopes."

"And I tell you, sir, that the news is worse."

Mr Draycott stared at his man, and began to frown. Strange suspicions attacked him as he saw that Jerry looked rough and unkempt. His hair was not brushed; he had evidently not washed that morning, and his Oxford mixture coat was marked by flour.

"By the way, sir," said the tutor, angrily, "where have you been? I rang twice, to send you to the doctor's, but the bell was not answered. Were you not up?"

"Not up, sir? Oh, yes; I was up and out long enough ago!"

"Out?"

"Yes, sir," said Jerry, speaking very sturdily and solemnly; and he related all that he had seen, with the result that the tutor sank into the nearest chair, looking ghastly, and with his lips moving, but not uttering a sound.

Jerry stood looking down at him sadly, and at the end of a few minutes he filled a glass from a waterbottle and handed the water to his master, who swallowed it hurriedly.

"This is too dreadful," said the latter, huskily; "too dreadful! But are you sure, my man—are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, sure enough!" replied Jerry, with a hoarse sob. "The miller saw him just before."

"A terrible business—a terrible business! I thought we were beginning to see daylight again; but—poor weak rash boy!—this is ten times worse!"

"Yes, sir—a hundred times!" said Jerry, with a groan; and master and man gazed in each other's eyes for some time in silence, till Mr Draycott gave a start.

"I am so stunned and helpless with this trouble upon trouble," he cried huskily, "that I can hardly think—I can hardly believe it true. Tell me what you have done. You gave notice to the police, of course?"

"The police, sir?" said Jerry, with a vacant look. "No; I never thought of that!"

"And you have not given the alarm—sent people down the river in boats?"

Jerry shook his head in a weary, helpless way.

"Quick, then; do something, man!" cried Mr Draycott, wildly. "Run to the station and tell the inspector; they will take steps at once."

"I—I thought you would want to hush it up, sir."

"Hush it up, man!" cried the tutor, angrily. "You are crazy!"

"Yes, sir, pretty nigh," said Jerry, pitifully. "My head feels as if it won't go; and I don't know what I'm saying half my time."

"I beg your pardon, Brigley," cried the tutor. "I spoke too hastily. I quite understand your feelings; but steps must be taken instantly. The truth must be known—the cruel truth!" he added, with a groan. "Yes; what is it?"

There was a tap at the chamber door, and Jerry went to open it.

"Please tell master that the London doctor has come in from the hotel and wants to see him directly."

"Ah, yes," said the tutor, who had heard every word; "I thought he would come early. Go on to the station, Brigley; tell them poor Sir Richard must be found. I'll go down to see the doctor."

Each departed upon his mission, and half an hour after the London surgeon took his departure, confirming his colleague's opinion that a great change for the better had taken place in Mark Frayne.

"Youth, my dear sir—youth! He has rallied wonderfully, and I feel that we may hope."

"But you will stop for the day?" said Mr Draycott, anxiously.

"There is not the slightest need, my dear sir. My colleague yonder will, unless something very unforeseen happens, pull him through."

"But if anything unforeseen does happen?" said Mr Draycott, nervously.

"Then telegraph to me, and I will come down at once. But I don't think you need fear, Mr Draycott, and I congratulate you upon the happy turn things have taken. Good-morning. I shall hurry off to catch an early train."

"Congratulate me upon the happy turn things have taken!" groaned the tutor, wiping his moist face. "Poor boy! poor boy! I ought to have seen him again. It was more than the high-spirited lad could bear."

"Yes, sir; that's it."

"You back, Brigley? Was I thinking aloud?"

"Yes, sir; and I heard every word."

"But the police?"

"They were off at once, sir. They're going to hire a big boat and try and find him; but the inspector shook his head. He says he thinks it means being washed away to sea."

That was a sad day at the tutor's, Richard Frayne's yellow-pupils going to and fro in the silent house talking of the cousins, and canvassing Richard Frayne's act from different points of view.

The news soon spread, too, in the town; for the setting-off of the police with a couple of stout boatmen and the drags was enough to set the place in a ferment.

There were plenty there, too, ready to talk of the position, as everything leaked out by degrees, and formed an exciting topic to add to that of the previous day, during which some hundreds had flocked down to the ruins to see the spot where the two pupils had fought and one had been killed—so it was firmly believed. Now the journeys were in the other direction—down the flooded river—but here the remains of the bridge and the spot where the mill had stood were the only things which rewarded their enterprise; for the police-boat had been swept down for miles, and it was not till dark that the men returned by rail to report that they could do nothing in the fierce, rushing waters till the flood was at an end.

That evening, to Jerry's great disgust, a crowd of idlers gathered on the opposite side of the road to stare at the tutor's house, where the blinds were drawn down, as if they secured great satisfaction in gaping and whispering one to the other.

"Oh!" he muttered, "if I could only have my way!"

Mr Shrubsole, the second doctor, undertook to stay at the house that night, in case of any relapse on the part of Mark, and to the tutor's great satisfaction, for he had fallen into a nervous state, wandering about the place and giving the pupils a fresh theme of conversation to occupy the dreary, slow-dragging time.

Jerry caught the inspector as he came out of Mr Draycott's study, and signalled him into the pantry.

"Then you did nothing?" he said.

"Yes, we did," said the inspector, grimly; "we saved our lives, which was about all we could do. I only went for the name of the thing, Mr Brigley—thankye, I'll say port. Of course, I went—ah! very nice full glass of wine. People's so ready to say, 'Where are the police?' that, if we hadn't gone, they'd ha' been ready to think the poor young gent was hanging on by the branch of a tree and we wouldn't go and save him. But I put it to you—well, thankye, Mr Brigley, I won't say no; didn't know you kept such a port as that."

"It won't be long before the water goes down?"

"No. Not it. Goes down, you know, as quickly as it goes up; but don't you expect too much, sir."

"You think you won't find him?"

"Yes; that's it," said the inspector. "Why, look at the way the water was rushing along! Of course, he may be picked up right away down where the tide rises—Limesmouth or Dunkney—or about there; but I say it's very doubtful."

"Ah!" sighed Jerry.

"Poor young chap! The times I've stopped outside listening to him on the flute, or blowing that cornet, or scraping away at the fiddle. Wonderful power of music in those fingers of his and lips."

"And now all still, and stiff, and cold!" groaned Jerry.

"Hold up, man—hold up!" said the inspector, kindly. "Life is short, you know; but we never expected this—did we?"

Jerry shook his head.

"And so the other young gent's getting better, is he?"

Jerry nodded.

"Yes, the doctor told me. I thought we'd got a big interesting case on there. Sensible?"

Jerry shook his head.

"Ah! That's what the doctor said, and that he might not be really sensible for weeks. Narrow squeak for him, eh?"

"Yes."

"Fancy! That poor young chap nearly killing him!"

"And serve him right!" shouted out Jerry, angrily. "Mr Frayne must have made him so mad he couldn't bear himself, and he hit out hard. It was only an accident, after all."

"But we should have been in it, Mr Brigley, even if he got off; and there would have been the inquest, too. Things have been a bit quiet here lately."

"Well, you'll have your inquest, after all," said Jerry, bitterly.

"Humph! Not so sure, sir. But it's a very, very sad business, Mr Brigley, and I must be going now. Thank you. Quite refreshing, sir! Good-night; and wish you well out of the trouble."

"Wish us well out of the trouble!" growled Jerry, bitterly. "As if there ever would be any way out of it. On'y to think—him upstairs getting better, and his people telegraphing to say they'll come over at once, and his cousin lying there out in the cold river, who knows how deep? It only wanted this to make me wish—"

Jerry did not finish his sentence, but took a letter out of his pocket, read it through, and uttered a derisive laugh.

"Yes; it only wanted this to help make me happy. Well, it wasn't so very much, but it's gone; and serve me right for being such a fool!"

Just then a bell rang, and he went to answer it.

"The doctor says we need not sit up, Brigley," said his master, sadly. "You are tired. I shall want you no more to-night. The nurse will get anything the doctor requires."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Jerry. "Mr Frayne, sir?—now?"

"Sleeping, I believe, Brigley. Good-night!"

"No; a bad night!" said Jerry. "Poor S'Richard! I'd give anything to see him again!"

Chapter Nine.

Dead—and Buried.

By the next morning the flood was subsiding rapidly, and at night the muddy meadows began to show that the river was sinking back into its bed.

All that evening boats were out, and people watched in expectation of that which they felt would soon be found.

Twenty-four hours more elapsed, and sheep, caught in hedgerows by the wool, were dragged through the mud and slime.

Lower down the river an ox or two were found, while news came of other carcasses, miles away, stranded in bends where gravel and mud had half-buried them.

But there was a good deal of water still in the river, and a threatening of another rise.

At Mr Draycott's Mark Frayne still lay insensible, but he seemed to sleep calmly enough, and was beginning to take the food given to him, while the doctors both agreed that there was no fear of a relapse; the only trouble was—What would the young man's mental state be when he recovered from his long stupor?

Day after day glided by. Mr and Mrs Frayne reached the house, Mark's father evidently painfully ill of the complaint which had taken him from his bleak Devonshire vicarage to the warmer climate and change of the South of France and the Riviera.

The news had been a very great shock, and the doctor looked at him anxiously as he went to his son's room, so weak that he had to be assisted by Jerry and the weeping mother.

They accepted Mr Draycott's hospitality and stayed, eager to be near their son, while longing to hear tidings of the discovery of their nephew—tidings that did not come.

Jerry stole away more than once to try and make out the exact place where he had seen Richard plunge in, and returned, shaking his head, for it was impossible.

Day by day he grew more morose, for fragments of the chatter reached him—petty talk, which blackened the young baronet's fame; while, worst stab of all, he read in the little local paper, where, in a long article concerning the trouble of "our respected townsman, Mr Draycott," it was said that the principal in the terrible tragedy had been guilty of that rash act to avoid the punishment likely to befall him consequent upon the assault he had committed and his connection with a monetary scandal.

"And if I go and punch the head of him as wrote that, they'll have me up before the magistrates," said Jerry; "and they call this a free land!"

Three weeks had passed, and Mark Frayne was beginning to show signs of returning consciousness, when, towards evening, the police inspector came to the house to ask to see Mr Draycott.

"He's in, I s'pose, Mr Brigley?" said the official, looking very serious and important.

"Oh, yes; he's in," said Jerry, excitedly; "but—tell me—have you found him?"

"Just got a wire, Mr Brigley, from Chedleigh, fifty mile away, sir!"

Jerry caught at one of the hall chairs, and made it scroop on the stone floor.

The news was correct enough, and the next day an inquest was held upon the cruelly disfigured body which had been discovered, stripped by the action of the flood, and buried in sand and stones.

Jerry was there to give his evidence, along with that of others; and, looking haggard and suffering from mental anxiety, Mr Draycott was there to give his. The medical man who had been called told of his examination, and, as there seemed to be no doubt as to the identity, a verdict was readily returned. Two days later there was a funeral at Richard Frayne's native place, and the unfortunate lad was laid to his rest—aged eighteen, people read upon his breastplate—just about the same time that Mark Frayne was lying upon his back, gazing at the open window, through which there came the pleasant odour of new-made hay, and wondering why he was there in bed, while a woman in white cap and apron was sitting reading.

"I say," he whispered at last; and the nurse started up, smiling.

"Yes?" she said, coming to his bedside.

"Who are you?"

"The nurse. Don't speak, please. You have been ill."

"Oh!" said Mark, "have I? Don't go away!"

"Only for a minute, to send word for somebody to come."

She stepped softly out into the corridor, just as the two pupils who had witnessed the encounter were coming upstairs.

"Would you mind telling Mrs Frayne that he is quite sensible now?"

"What! Mark Frayne?" cried Sinjohn. "Yes; all right."

The two young men turned and went together to deliver the news.

"Then he is really getting well," said Andrews, in a whisper. "Why, Sin, if he does, he'll be Sir Mark Frayne!"

"Not while his father lives," said the other. "But only think!—poor old Dick buried to-day! I wish we could have gone."

"Yes," said Andrews, bitterly. "Poor old Dick!"

"We shall never hear his flute agin!"

Chapter Ten.

Into the Swift Waters.

"Oh! I wouldn't have done that!"

Of course you would not. No sane lad would ever be led away by his imagination to be guilty of any folly whatever. No one with a well-balanced brain would, for a moment, ever dream of being guilty of an act that would cause him repentance for years. In other words, we are all of us so thoroughly perfect that we go straight on through life, laughing at temptations, triumphing over our weakness, and so manly and confident in our own strength of mind that we continue our life's journey, never slipping, never stumbling, but bounding along to its highest point, where we pitch our caps in the air, flap our arms for want of wings, stretch out our throats, open our beaks, and cry "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" which, being translated from the gallinaceous tongue into plain English, means—"Look at me! Here I am! Did you ever see such a fine fellow in your life? I don't believe there was ever my equal born into the world!"

There was a comic philosopher born in the West, and his name was Artemus Ward; and every now and then, after a verbal flourish of this kind, he used to conclude by saying—

"This is wrote sarcastic."

So are these remarks concerning Richard Frayne's act, when, agonised by the horror of his position, and rankling mentally at being believed contemptible enough to have obtained the money, monkey-fashion, by using his cousin as catspaw, he had gradually become so out of balance that he was ready for any reckless act.

A few words from the proper quarter would have set him right; a kindly bit or two of sympathy from his fellow-students would have helped him; but everyone but the servant held rigidly aloof, and when the dark, blank night-time came, and the long hours of agony culminated in a feeling of utter, hopeless despair, he sat alone there in his room, ready to dash at anything which would, even if temporarily, relieve him from the terrible strain.

At last he forced himself into thinking as calmly as he could, setting himself to consider all that he had to face.

Mark was dying fast. The doctors had said it, and in a few hours he would stand in the eyes of the world as, if not his murderer, the cause of his death. Next there must be that terrible public examination and the verdict—manslaughter; it could be no other, he told himself. Then there would be a magisterial examination, ending in his being committed for trial. After this, a long, weary waiting—possibly on bail—and then the trial.

He arranged all of it in his own mind, perfectly satisfied that his view was too correct, and never once stopping to think that people would calmly investigate every circumstance of the trouble, and, while making every allowance, sift out the pearl truth from the sand and bitter ashes in which it was hidden. In his then frame of mind, he could only think the very worst of everything; for always before him was that terrible scene in which he was bound to take part. He felt that he could nerve himself to stand before coroner, magistrate, even judge, if matters went so far; but he could not face the sweet-faced, sorrowing mother and the weak invalid father, who must be now hastening back to their dying son as fast as trains could bear them.

Condemn, pity, ridicule, which you will; but the fact remains. A kind of panic had attacked Richard Frayne, and he prepared for the folly he was about to commit. There were the two courses open—a frank, manly meeting of the consequences, whatever they might be, or the act of a coward.

The hours passed, and his mind was fully made up. And now everything he did was in a quiet, decisive fashion, with as much method in his madness as ever the great poet endowed his Danish hero.

He changed his clothes, putting on the quiet dark tweed suit Jerry missed, and went back into his room, to stand there in the gloom, looking round and vainly trying to make out the various objects there, every one being loved like some old friend.

But he could not look the farewell, and began slowly to go round the room, laying his hand upon each in turn—his favourite books and pictures, his piano, the violin, the cornet, and the big 'cello in its case where it stood in the corner—all such dear old friends, and it was good-bye for ever!

And as he went on, his hand at last touched the little, long morocco case lying upon the side-table.

He clutched it hard, and something like a sob struggled to his lips; for that case contained, in company with the little piccolo, the flute that was once the property of the brave old soldier whose helmet hung dented there with its drooping black horse-hair plume.

Richard's thoughts went back into the past, and he recalled the evenings when he as a little child was enraptured listening to some operatic selection brilliantly played, while his mother sat accompanying upon the piano. Then he recollected the first lessons given him by his father upon that very flute, and years after the plaudits he listened to with burning cheeks after he had played one of his father's favourite pieces with such skill and execution that these words followed:

"Keep the flute, Dick, my boy, for my sake; it is yours."

And now he was bidding it farewell for ever—there in the darkness of that lonely night, whose silence was broken from time to time by the chiming and booming of the great Cathedral clock, which once more, to his disordered imagination, seemed associated with a solemn procession to the tomb.

Richard Frayne's breast swelled and his hands trembled as his fingers clung round that little morocco case. Then, as a weak sob once more struggled for utterance, his breast swelled suddenly more and more, till there was a long, hard lump down the left side beneath the closely-buttoned jacket.

For, quick as lightning, the little case had been transferred to his breast-pocket. It was his father's. He could not part from that.

The rest of the favourite objects lying around were quickly touched; and then, there, in the middle of the room, the lad stood, feeling old and careworn, opposite two relics which he felt would be honourably removed from where they hung and sent away.

He could not see them—and yet he could, inwardly, in his mind's eye—the gilded metal helmet and the sabre.

Then, as if performing some solemn act, the lad took a couple of steps towards the wall, gently and reverently lifted down the helmet, pressed his lips to the front, and put it back, to take down the sword and hold the blade and scabbard to his breast as he kissed the hilt.

Saddened visions came trooping before his closed eyes in that darkness—of himself: a man, a soldier, as his father had been, an officer leading men against the enemies of his country; and at that, in his despair, he uttered a low, piteous sigh, and hung the sword in its place.

He drew back then, uttering a sound like a moan, and opened his eyes with a start; for a pale, bluish light was slowly filling the room—a light that seemed ghastly to him and unreal.

But it was the dawn of another day, the most eventful of his life, and he knew it was time to act.

There was one more thing to be done, and his action in this was accompanied by a shudder.

But he was quite firm and determined now, for his mind was fully made up. He had that to do first, and he would do it.

He was already at the door, hat in hand, when he recalled another little thing, and, turning quickly back to the table, he sat down and wrote the few lines to Jerry, folded them, and laid them near the loaf, from which earlier in the night he had broken off a few fragments to allay the gnawing hunger he had felt.

Now that was all, and, turning to the door once more, he paused for a final look round at the shadowy room, where the only thing which stood out clearly was the helmet, and this, seen in profile, seemed to assume a stern and threatening aspect.

The next minute he was outside in the dark passage, listening; and then, as all was still, he walked, firmly and quietly, to the other end of the mansion, to stop by his cousin's door.

Here the chill of death seemed to strike upon him. No light stole through crack or keyhole—all was darkness and silence—and he sank upon his knees, to remain motionless for a few minutes, and then rise firmer of purpose than ever.

It was later than he thought, for his various preparations had taken time; and the soft glow of morning lit up the east staircase window as he slowly raised it, stepped out on to the leads, closed it again, and then, climbing over the balcony rails, lowered himself down till he could hang for a moment or two from the bottom of one of the iron bars, swing himself to and

fro by his wrists, and then, with a backward spring, drop lightly on to the turf beneath.

In another minute—unseen, unheard—he had passed out of the gate and was walking through the town, making for the lower road and the swollen river.

Here he rapidly awoke to the fact that the waters were out far more widely than he had ever seen them before; and again and again, as he made for the path that ran along by the river toward the bridge, he was driven back, the flood turning the different lanes he tried into huge ditches or canals.

He tried every turning so as to reach the bridge as soon as possible, but it was always the same; and finally, after consuming a good deal of time, he made his way round by the road, following it on till it bore away to his right, crossing the river by the old two-spanned wooden bridge and then winding onward among the sunny vales and hills of Kent.

As he walked on swiftly, now in the bright sunshine, it was with his head lowered and a curious feeling of guilt troubling him. He told himself that he ought to have left the place sooner, and he shivered at the thought of being seen by someone who, knowing all the circumstances, would catch him by the arm and insist upon his going back.

But, at heart, he knew that the words would be in vain. Back he would never go, and, strong and active, he felt that he could easily free himself from the detaining clutch, and then—there was the river.

Richard had some recollection of passing or being passed by a man with sheep; but he was coming in the opposite direction, and this did not seem an enemy to fear, as he shouted from beyond the flock, and above the patter of their hoofs, a cheery "Good-morning."

Richard smiled bitterly to himself as he hurried on. Good-morning! If that happy, careless fellow had known!

At last, with his heart beating fast, and with the rushing sound of the river ever on the increase, he turned the curve which led to the wooden bridge, and, with his eyes fixed upon the dusty road, increased his pace, till he was suddenly brought up short, just as he was about to step down into the foaming, roaring flood.

Richard Frayne stood there aghast, staring at the gulf before him, and then at the ragged piles on the other side, from which the hard light-coloured road ran on and on between hedges, rising higher and higher above unflooded meadows—the road leading to safety and rest, away from the terrible troubles which had driven him to this wildly reckless act.

For Jerry Brigley was as wrong as he was right—right in his surmise that Richard would seek the bridge, which crossed the river at its deepest part, but wrong in imagining that it was for so horrible a deed.

No: it was the way to safety—to places where he was unknown. There was an idea fixed in his mind, and it was to carry out this idea that he had sought the bridge—to find it gone, and escape in that direction gone as well!

Still, he could swim vigorously as a young seal; but he shrank from so desperate a venture, for the swirling flood told him too plainly that it would be extremely doubtful whether the strongest swimmer who ventured there would ever reach the other side. If he did, it would be miles below. And as he looked, it was to see the carcase of a horse, a great willow-tree (torn out by the roots), and a broken gate float by.

What should he do?

There was a ferry two miles beyond the mill, but he felt that no boat would take him across.

There was the old stone bridge, too, at Raynes Corner, six miles down the road. Well, he must cross there, for it was not likely that the sturdy piers could have suffered even from such a flood as this.

That would do. He would get over the river there; but he must avoid the road, where he might meet the police or people going into the town, who knew him by sight as one of Mr Draycott's pupils.

Fortunately he knew the country well, and he could go along the high bank below the bridge as far as the mill, get into the field path at the back, and pass through the woods, and on and on as near the river as he could wherever the waters were not out.

Climbing over the rails by the side of the raised road, he dropped down and hurried down to the mill, to find to his dismay that beyond it the fields were covered and that a great

deal of the woodland was under water, too. As for the path at the side of the mill, it was only dry for some twenty yards, and then ended in a dark-looking lake.

It was impossible to go by there, and he turned back toward the bridge, glancing up at the back of the mill as he reached it to see if he was observed.

But not a soul was stirring, for the simple reason that it had been closed just before; and he sighed as he thought of the pleasant days he had spent there, seated upon the weir, gazing down at the bar-sided perch playing about and shrimp-seeking in the weeds of the piles, and at the great fat barbel wallowing in the gravelly holes where the stream ran swiftest.

Happy days gone for ever, he thought, as he stepped out once more on the bank path, towards whose surface the tide was rapidly climbing up. He was making for the bridge once more, when his ears were thrilled by a faint, hoarse cry; and, as he looked in its direction, it was to see a white face, level with the muddy water, gliding rapidly down behind the saturated fleecy coat of a drowned sheep, which was evidently keeping the unfortunate up.

It was a boy, by the smooth face—probably a shepherd lad, swept in while endeavouring to preserve his charge—only Richard did not think of that. His own troubles were forgotten, his best instincts aroused, in the desire to save the drowning lad.

He saw at a glance how short a distance the helpless boy was from the bank, and that an eddy was setting him in so near that, if he went close down to the rushing water, he might be able to reach out and seize the fleece of the sheep as they passed.

In a few seconds Richard was down, knee-deep in water, holding on with his left hand to the reedy growth of the bank and reaching out to snatch at the sheep.

Vain attempt.

The dead animal did not come within five yards, but, after curving in, literally shot out again towards the middle of the river and was borne down, the boy uttering a despairing wail as he saw his help fade away.

At the same moment Richard Frayne felt the mud giving beneath his feet, and he had hard work to struggle out on to firm land. And then there was another despairing cry for help, so faint and yet so penetrating to the cowardly fugitive's heart that he turned, forgot everything but the fact that a brother was dying before his eyes, and took one brave plunge into the swollen river, to pass under into the thunderous darkness, feeling as if he had suddenly been grasped by a giant who was bearing him down.

Chapter Eleven.

A Good Servant and Bad Master.

It was a good thirty yards from where Richard Frayne dived in, and when a strange bewildering sense of suffocation was beginning to make itself his master. He had tried again and again to rise, but the water pressed him down and forced him to the bottom. At last, with one desperate kick, he drove himself upward and saw the daylight once again as he struck out vigorously, following the natural instinct to reach the bank.

But as the water cleared from his eyes, his mental vision cleared as well, and, looking sharply over his shoulder, he caught sight of the white face once more, glistening on a level with the water not five yards away, and a hand rose above the surface and fell with a splash.

Recollecting now why he had plunged in, Richard made a quick stroke or two, turned on his side, and swam with all his strength after the drowning boy, about whom the water was swirling round in giddy whirlpools, each of which seemed to be animated by the desire to drag him beneath.

The mill was already far behind, and they were gliding rapidly downward and round one of the curves of the winding river, the stream bearing them so closely in towards the left that Richard had but to raise a hand to snatch at the boughs of a submerged tree and drag himself out to temporary safety; and as in a misty way he realised this, but made no effort to catch the bough, he saw the sheep whirled round and then shot off almost at right angles from the tree towards the opposite bank, while the boy's face had disappeared.

The next moment the fierce current caused by the flood striking upon the clump of trees firmly rooted in the bank caught Richard Frayne in turn, and he felt himself swept right off in the same direction, and so swiftly that it was as if in a few minutes he would be swept high and dry up among the bushes visible on the other side.

Nerved by this, he swam on vigorously in pursuit of the carcase of the sheep, in the faint hope that the boy might be still retaining his hold; but though he kept himself in the right direction and was gliding rapidly on, he did not lessen the distance between him and the patch of wool in the slightest degree. Once he fancied that he saw the surface stir between them, as if a struggle was going on; but he could not be sure, and then the distance increased, but only for a few moments. Then, to his surprise, that distance was lessened; for the fierce stream swirled round again as if rebounding from the riverside, and the current set back to that from which he had come.

Not four yards between them now; and, making a few frantic efforts, the lad forced himself through the water in his effort to lessen the distance and grasp the sheep, when suddenly the surface was parted; a bare arm and hand appeared clutching at the air, then another just level with the surface, and before he could avoid it, he was clutched in the death-grip of the drowning boy and borne under, the current seeming to roll them over, down into the darkness of the thick water which roared and thundered in his ears.

Richard's first impulse was to struggle free, his next to force himself to the surface; but both efforts were in vain. He was as firmly bound as if he had been chained, and a horrible feeling of despair attacked him as he felt that he was losing consciousness fast, that all was over, and the end at hand. Then, as his senses were leaving him, there was a gleam of daylight for an instant as he and his companion were rolled over by the current. The darkness deepened, and there was a violent shock, the tearing and rending of boughs, and light once more.

For a few minutes Richard could do nothing but cling instinctively to the twiggy bough up which he had struggled till his face was a little above the surface, his hands a few inches higher still, and his body dragged out level with the water; while it seemed to him that the unfortunate boy he had tried to save was tugging violently at his waist to drag him from his hold, bending and shaking the bough till it swayed to and fro like a spring.

For some little time his clinging was instinctive, every fibre in his body naturally resisting the savage jerks to tear him from his hold; but by degrees he recovered sufficiently to realise his position, and his heart gave a great leap as he found for certain that, though something which felt like a ragged garment was wound about his legs, he was once more free, and that his drowning companion's grasp had been torn away when the furious current swept them into the tree.

Of its force he kept on gaining fresh consciousness as the tugging continued and the tree yielded and sprung back, and with this consciousness something of the horror of his position passed away. It was the strong current he had to deal with alone.

And now, as he drew his breath freely, but one thought filled him—the natural desire of self-preservation. What could he do? for it would be impossible to hang on long like that.

He looked up stream, but he could see naught but water, and the flood was out widely on both sides. But the regular bank of the river must be beneath him, and the only chance seemed to be to climb up into the ragged top of the willow to whose pendent boughs he clung: a poor kind of refuge, but safety till the water sank.

The bough was of no great size, but about a couple of yards away there was one far larger, and, waiting for a few minutes longer, till the heavy beating of his heart subsided and he could breathe more easily, he gradually lowered himself toward the greater bough by relinquishing his hold upon its fellow to which he clung.

It was a horrible sensation, though, for it seemed to give the water greater power to drag and snatch at him, and for some little time he dared not quit his hold. But at last he ventured with one hand, got a firm grip of a moderate bough, and before he could loosen his grasp with the other he felt a violent shock: it was torn away, and he was swept over the submerged twigs, having hard work to get a fresh hold.

Then the water passed over him, for quite a wave had descended the river at that moment, whose impetus, and the jerk given to the tree, was too much for its stability. Already undermined by the furious rush of the flood, that new leverage at the end of the longest bough was enough, and its top came slowly down overhead, while the bough to which the lad clung slowly sank.

Once more the instinct of self-preservation helped, and, quitting his hold, he allowed himself to be carried downward by the current as the top boughs splashed up the water not a yard behind.

How long his new struggle lasted he could not tell; all he knew was that he was being borne along the furious river at racing speed, having hard work to keep his head above water and avoid the various objects which cumbered the stream. But he swam bravely from time to time, gazing wildly at the trees he passed standing deeply in the tide as he was borne from side to side, till at last, with his senses beginning to fail, and the water rising higher and higher above his chin, a dim sensation of its being time to relax his efforts dawned upon him, in company with a strange drowsiness, just as he felt a heavy, sickening shock, which had the effect of making coruscations of light flash before his eyes; then he flung out his arms wildly, roused to renewed action for a few moments by the blow, and lastly all was blank.

Chapter Twelve.

A Hard Fight.

Richard Frayne opened his eyes, to gaze about him dreamily for some little time before he could grasp what had happened and where he was. Then a throbbing in his head and a sensation of smarting assailed him, but he did not stir, for his legs were cramped; and *wash, wash, wash*, the waters were sweeping along nearly to his chest.

At last, with a bound, full consciousness returned, and he realised that he was lying wedged in amongst a pile of broken woodwork, evidently a great shed or barn which had been swept down the river till its progress had been checked by a clump of elm-trees, and the force of the water had rent it up and piled the broken posts and rafters, driving them, and pressing them by its weight into a chaotic mass, over and through which the torrent rushed.

The drowning lad had been driven heavily by the force of the stream right upon this wreck, head and shoulders above the surface, and, though the water had torn and dragged at him afterwards, it was only to wedge him in more firmly, so that it was some time before he could free his legs from where they

were, fast between two beams, the heavy pressure of the water forcing them ever down toward where it rushed furiously through the timbers. But at last he managed to climb higher and rest, panting, upon the sloping mass of woodwork, with the water streaming from him and the hot sunshine beginning to send a glow into his benumbed limbs.

He was so far down the river now that the country round beyond the flooded meadows looked strange; but he soon grasped the fact that he was on the far side of the river at the edge of a wood, among whose trees the stream was hissing as it ran, and that about a hundred yards away the land rose in a sunny coppice, edged by tall timber trees, whose continuity was suggestive of a road.

It was pleasant and warm there, and he lay for some time without feeling the slightest disposition to stir, till a creaking and cracking sound startled him into action, suggestive as it was of the breaking up of the pile of timber. And now, in an agony of fear, Richard rose to his knees and looked wildly round for a way of escape.

On three sides there was the rushing flood; on the fourth the water, broken into hundreds of little torrents, tearing among the trees.

What should he do?

His brain was active enough now, and, to a great extent, his strength had returned; but he hesitated to move, till another sharp crack told him that the wreck was really breaking up; and, with the wood quivering beneath his feet, he sprang from rafter to beam till he reached one of the trees which held the barn anchored, and was beginning to climb up, when the wood before him tempted him to try if he could not pass from tree to tree, clinging to them in turn till he could reach the slope, where he would be safe.

The risk was terrible, for, as he held on to a tree-trunk and lowered himself down into the water, it bore him off his feet; and, had he not clung with all his might, he would have been whirled away and dashed against the one beyond.

But, working himself round, he stood, with his breath catching, pressed hard against the tree, and tried to think of what to do next and whether he had not better climb back upon the pile of wood.

That question was soon decided, for a loud crackling sound came from the place he had so lately left, and, to his horror, he saw the wreck crumble away and begin to sink steadily beneath the surface, long rafters raising their ends in the air and then diving down out of sight, while several shot by him, one of which he seized and held on to, in spite of the heavy drag of the water seeming to try and snatch it away.

The brain acts rapidly sometimes in moments of emergency, and Richard Frayne had seen in that rafter which he seized the life-rail which would help him to safety; for to have attempted to wade from place to place he found would be madness, and his only chance would have been to let himself go with the current—driven from tree to tree—while he strove to move diagonally, getting farther towards dry land and safety at each attempt. But he had no faith in this; and, feeling that a third battle with the river must be fatal, he clung to the great rafter which was to be his narrow road to safety.

He glanced once at the spot where the pile of wood had been, and shuddered; then, calling up all the energy which remained—feeling, as he did, that at any time the tree against which he was held might give way—he wound his legs round it, gripping hard, and tried to pass the rafter along till its end rested against the next stem, about nine feet away.

But every time he tried the piece was dragged down by the rushing water foaming between the trunks, and twice over he nearly lost it, while once he was within an ace of going with it through the wood.

He saved it, though, and held on, panting, beaten as he was by the enormous power of the water, which acted on the end as if it were the lever with which the poor puny human being was to be dislodged.

For a few minutes he was in despair, for he felt that it was impossible to get the square piece of quartering resting from tree to tree, and that he might as well give it up and try to climb.

Then the way to succeed came like a flash, and he wondered that he had not thought of it before. It was to hold the rafter as firmly as he could, and, instead of thrusting it sideways across the stream, to push it straight upwards, guiding it so that the water only pressed upon its end.

This he tried, and passed it backwards—holding it tightly beneath his arm—farther and farther, till there was only another yard. Then, he felt the long end begin to move: the stream had caught it, and in a few seconds it was swept down, he forcing it outward the while and feeling it checked by the tree he wished to reach. Then there was a short struggle, and he had fixed his end between his chest and the tree to which his legs clung, and there was a rail for him to cling to as he tried to pass on.

He did not pause now. The rafter was pressed tightly against the trees, but it looked terribly unsafe, bending ominously in the middle. But it seemed to be his only chance, and, seizing it firmly, he began to work himself along, his legs being swept away directly, and the force of the current so great that he could hardly stir.

He succeeded, though, for the distance was short, and in a couple of minutes was pressed against the second tree, holding on again with his legs, and working the other end of the rafter free for it to be swept downward, and once more nearly snatched from his grasp.

This time he managed better, working it under his left arm, end to the current, keeping it as straight as possible, and guiding it so that he had less difficulty when the point began to sway round and, in turn, was swept against the next tree, while he passed the near end over his head and dropped it between him and the trunk.

The passing along it, too, he managed more easily, though he shuddered as he felt how it bent when he reached the middle, and hurried so as to get to the next tree to rest.

The third stage was easier still, and he crept on in this way from tree to tree, six, eight, and ten feet at a time, till, to his great delight, he found the water waist instead of breast-high. Ten minutes later it was not more than half-way up this height, and in another five he left the rafter still pressed against two trunks, and waded through the rushing stream, holding on by bough after bough, till he stood triumphantly upon dry land. Then after walking a few yards to an open patch by a pit where the sun shone warmly, he dropped upon his knees in hot, loose, yellow sand, and crouched there till his breath came regularly and he could look more calmly round.

The place was in the wood, shut in by a few trees and great patches of golden-blossomed furze. The sun came down warmly, birds twittered in the boughs, and a couple of rabbits

showed their white cottony tails for a moment or two as they plunged down into their burrows, while above all, in a low, deep, roaring bass, there was the heavy thunder of the river as it swept sand, gravel, trees, and everything it could tear from its flooded banks, toward the sea.

Richard Frayne felt that he must be miles away from Primchilsea, and that he was in as lonely a country place as he could have selected; and now for the first time the discomforts of his personal condition began to make themselves felt, as there was no more serious call upon his brain.

His hat had gone when he first plunged into the river, but he did not seem to have lost anything else, for his jacket was buttoned tightly over the little case; but the hot sunshine now, paradoxical as it may sound, began to make him feel chilly—of course, from the great evaporation going on.

Taking off his garments, then, one by one, he wrung and spread them on the hot sand, emptying his boots and serving them the same, when, after wringing out his socks and placing them to dry, a good idea occurred to him, and he filled his boots with the hottest, dryest sand he could find.

His next course was to roll in the same, which felt grateful indeed to his benumbed and chilled limbs, the skin being blue with the cold; and the next minute he was lying down in a sunny hollow and dragging the sand over him till he was covered to the neck, a little loosening of the dry fluent stuff making it trickle down over his free arm. There he was, luxuriating in the sunny warmth, with a feeling of drowsiness gradually creeping over him, till all was blank once more, exhausted nature bearing him into a pleasant, restful oblivion, from which he did not awaken till all overhead was starlight. The consequence was that he dropped asleep again—a heavy, dreamless rest of so reposeful a nature that the troubles of the last forty-eight hours died away, and he did nothing but sleep—sleep on with all his might.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Goal.

"Chare! chare! chare!"

A harsh, ear-piercing note, sounding as if a scythe-blade were being held against a rapidly-revolving grindstone, and then the sound died away.

Then, again, from a distance, then from farther off, and once more from close at hand.

The next minute there was a fluttering amongst the dense clumps of hazel, a glint of velvety black, and another of pure white, and directly after a goodsized bird hopped into sight, showing a big, closely-feathered warm grey, speckly head, a pair of keen, inquiring blue eyes, below which were two boldly-marked jetty moustaches.

There was a repetition of the harsh cries, as if the bird-scout were shouting to companions what he had found. These cries were answered from different directions, and another bird flew out of the wood and clung to a stout, upright hazel: one leg full-stretch, the other doubled close, and the claws hidden in the warm grey fluffy breast feathers; and as it closed its pinions and hung peering about there, it revealed, in addition to its beautiful patches of white and black, the turquoise barred blue markings upon its wings.

Then another came, and another; all noisy, and eager to investigate the novel phenomenon newly discovered by the sand-pit in the wood.

The sun shone brightly upon millions of glittering gems, most of which adorned the leaves of the hazels, the ferns, and the spines and blossoms of the gold and tawny furze; but others had formed upon certain peculiar patches of cloth, a singularly-shaped piece of checked flannel, and a square of something white. But these passed as nothing to the lively party of jays, seeing that there were two wonderful objects standing alone, side by side, full of sand, while an oval whitish something lay half-buried close by.

Then one of the jays uttered a shriek of terror, for the oval whitish something was suddenly lit up by the opening of a couple of lids which lay bare a pair of dazzled eyes, and these winked, and the lids quivered before they were closed again.

"*Chare! chare! chare!*" in a wild chorus of scare dying rapidly away made Richard Frayne spring up, realise his position, and, after shaking off the sand, rapidly scramble on his things, which—save a little dewy moisture still left unimbibed by the sun—were dry and warm.

As he dressed he felt his pockets, where everything was right, even to his pocket comb, and in a few minutes he was dressed all but his boots, which, after they had been emptied of the sand, were as dry as the rest; and there he stood, all but his hat, ready for a fresh start.

Not quite; for he thought of the absent bath, and then shuddered and listened for the roar of the river, now softened down into a murmur.

The idea of going to some muddy pool to wash was too repellent, and, making his way, rested and refreshed, out of the sand-pit, he stood thinking, not hesitating, for his mind had been made up before he left Mr Draycott's.

And as he stood there in the glorious morning sunshine, anyone who knew him would have noted that a change had come during these last days. His face looked old and thin, and there was an air of determination about his compressed lips which had not been there before.

The next minute, after marking the direction of the sun, he was tramping through the wood in search of the first lane. This would, sooner or later, lead him into others, and they, perhaps, into the main road, the one which he could follow east to the goal he sought.

How far he was from Primchilsea he could not tell, and he did not feel as if he wished to know. All that belonged to the past: his life now was in the future—a future which he meant to carve out for himself, forgetful of Burns's aphorism about the best-laid plans of mice and men. He forced himself now, with more or less success, as he tramped on, to forget the past and think only of the present; but another shudder ran through him as there rose before him the face of the drowning lad, with its wild, appealing stare, and his brow wrinkled as he asked himself whether he had really done everything possible to save another's life.

There could be only one answer to this, and he walked on, feeling saddened, as he knew only too well that the poor fellow, in his helpless state, must have sunk to rise no more.

Then, in spite of his efforts, the thoughts of the past would obtrude themselves—of his cousin, of the scene at Mr Draycott's when it was found that he was missing. Lastly he thought of Jerry, and a faint, saddened kind of smile crossed his face as he knew how troubled the man would be; for he felt that Jerry

liked him, and he was sad as he told himself that he would never see him more.

By this time he had tramped a couple of miles, having reached a shady lane, and now a gleam of sunshine on ahead showed him that for which he was looking—a little stream.

This crossed the road, but the water was muddy and foul, for it communicated with the river, and the flood had ascended it like a tide; but a quarter of a mile farther on he came across the stream again, trickling now among watercress by the side of the road, and here it was bright, pure, and sparkling, offering him, in one spot, a splendid basin in which to bathe face and hands, from which task he rose up refreshed, and trudged on, thinking of trying at the first village he reached for a hat or cap.

An hour had passed before the opportunity offered, and then, next door to a little inn, he found a regular village shop, where pretty well everything could be purchased.

A woman served him, and looked at him curiously; for it did not happen every morning for a good-looking, quiet youth in tweeds to enter, as soon as she was down, to buy himself a flannel cricketer's cap, because he had lost his own, and then, upon paying for it and reaching the doorway, turn round and buy a small yesterday's cottage loaf and a piece of cheese, which he tied up in his handkerchief, said "Good-morning," and walked off, well watched by the inquisitive shopkeeper till he was out of sight.

"Now I never made a bet in my life," she said, as she turned away to prepare her breakfast, "and I don't know how it's done; but I'd lay a penny that that young man met robbers on the road who stole his hat, and that he is going to seek his fortune just as we read about in books."

She never knew how nearly she was right, and Richard did not give her a second thought as he walked steadily on till well out of sight of the village, when he began to relieve the painful gnawing sensation of hunger, from which he suffered, by breaking off pieces of his loaf.

Then came a little bit of satisfaction; for, passing a farmhouse in a lonely spot, he saw a big heavy-looking woman carrying a couple of pails full of frothy new milk to the door, and, following her, he soon had his desire for a pint of the warm sweet fluid satisfied.

Nerved now for his task, he started off afresh, walking vigorously and well, keeping as near as he could due east, and passing village after village, and then a town, and at last seating himself among the ferns upon a shady bank to dine on bread and cheese and a draught of water from a trickling spring.

There was no pleasure in the eating; it was from stern necessity, and he ate with a determination to carry out the plan he had in view—to give himself support for the task which lay ahead and kept him with rugged brow, dreamy and thoughtful, as he tramped along till night, when he entered a large village, and, after a search, found a tiny inn, where he was accommodated with supper and a bed.

The next day passed in much the same way, with the past seeming to belong to a far-off time, and the future looming up cold and cheerless, but more and more real as the hours went by. He had calculated that he would reach his destination that evening; but, journeying as he did, asking guidance of none, he missed his way, and walked back many miles along a lower lane which ran parallel to the one by which he had come. Consequently, he had to sleep another night upon the road.

"It does not matter," he said to himself in a stern, hopeless way; and, with the past farther back than ever, he started early the next morning, tramping through the chalky dust slowly now, for he did not want to get to his destination yet; and, as he walked, he noted the farms and cherry orchards he passed upon the road, but in a dull, uninterested manner, and, bending his head low, he tramped on again.

The fear of being followed and taken back had quite gone. No one knew him, and his aspect was not one which would take the notice of the police whom he met from time to time.

"They don't know that I killed my cousin," he said bitterly; but he pulled himself up short— That belonged to the past!

It was early in the afternoon that he crossed the stone bridge and went steadily on through the streets of the dingy town, with signs here and there of the maritime character of the place, and others which interested him more, though in a saddened way. From time to time he caught sight of specks of the Queen's scarlet, which resolved themselves into military jackets, cut across by pipe-clayed belts. Then there was the blue of an artilleryman, with its yellow braid; more scarlet, that of an engineer; and soon after the blackish-green of a rifleman.

For Richard Frayne, son of a distinguished officer, was tramping through a garrison town towards the great dingy barracks, and his future was rapidly taking form and shape.

Chapter Fourteen.

The Lads in Red.

If Richard Frayne had stopped to look back, his career would have been very different; but he had fully and stubbornly made up his mind, and he looked forward as he walked on and on through the apparently endless streets of what he found to be a trio of towns; and as he approached the great barracks he was conscious of the shrieking of fifes and the roll of drums, which suddenly ceased as a crowd of rough-looking boys and people came along a side-lane, down which, and rapidly approaching, was the shining and glittering of a long line of bayonets, while in front came the gleam of brass instruments.

As the head of the regiment marching into the town reached the main street, *boom—boom—boom*—came the heavy thunder of the big drum; and then, in full burst of the brass instruments, the first bars of the grand March from *Tannhäuser*, sending the first thrill of pleasure he had felt for days through Richard's breast, as he naturally fell into step and marched along side by side with the men.

But the thrill soon passed off, and as he tramped on he could not help thinking, in a low-spirited way, that the men looked dusty and fagged. The chalky white powder clung to their blue trousers and scarlet coatees; their shakoes, too, were whitened, and their hot faces were grimed and coated with perspiration and dust.

In spite of the music, there was something wanting; and in a few minutes Richard Frayne slackened his pace, so that the regiment went on past him, and he followed more slowly, for there was nothing attractive about the men.

But he had not come down there spurred on by any boyish admiration for the army. His was a set purpose, and, after letting the marching regiment disappear, with a peculiar sensation of sadness affecting him as he stole a glance—he could hardly bear to look—at the officers, he turned off along one of the side-streets and passed through the great gates of

one of the barracks. Here he could see a round-faced, fat man, whose clothes looked ridiculously tight, hurrying to and fro before a double line of men in flannel jackets, and at whom he seemed to be barking loudly.

He was a peculiar-looking man for a soldier, suggesting, as he did at a distance, an animated pincushion, one huge pin being apparently stuck right through his chest, though a second glance revealed the fact that it was only a cane with a gilt head passed, skewer fashion, in front of his elbows and behind his back.

Then a few evolutions were gone through, and Richard Frayne thought the men looked a melancholy set of dummies, more like plasterers than soldiers, till at the loudly-shouted word "Dis—miss!" they trotted off readily enough.

Just then a couple of sergeants marched a squad of twelve or fourteen shabby-looking young fellows into the barrack yard, the whole party wearing the ribbons of the recruit, and toward this group, as if they were an attraction, the fat drill-sergeant and some half-dozen more from different parts of the yard walked slowly up.

Richard's pulses beat fast as he stood looking on, conscious the while that a tall, keen-looking non-commissioned officer who passed him was watching him curiously.

Then followed a little loud talking and laughing, and the party of recruits were marched across the yard and disappeared, leaving the group of sergeants chatting together, till one of them seemed to have said something to his companions, who, as if by one consent, turned to stare at Richard Frayne.

"Now for it," muttered the lad, and, drawing a deep breath, he pulled himself together, feeling as if he were going to execution, and walked straight toward them, feeling the blood come and go from his cheeks.

The men stood fast, looking at him in a half-amused, good-tempered way, as if he was not the first by many a one who had approached them in that fashion, and the keen-faced man said in quick, decisive tones the words which ended one of the boy's difficulties—

"Well, my lad, want to 'list?"

Only those few hours ago and people touched their hats to him and said, "Sir Richard;" now it was, "Well, my lad, want to 'list?" But he answered promptly—

"Yes; I want to enlist."

"Hah!" ejaculated the sergeant, looking him over keenly, and grasping him by the arm as if he were a horse for sale. "How old are you?"

"Turned seventeen."

"Hah! Yes," said the sergeant, with a keen look; "old story, eh? Run away from home?"

Richard's face turned scarlet.

"That'll do, my lad; don't tell any crackers about it. See these chaps just brought in?"

"Yes."

"Well, there isn't one who doesn't stand two or three inches higher than you, and is as many more round the chest. Men are plentiful now of the right sort. Why, you'd look as thin as a rake in our clothes."

"But I'm young, and I shall grow," said Richard, hurriedly.

"Then go home and grow bigger and wiser, my lad; and if you still want to join the service, come and ask for me, Sergeant Price, 205th Fusiliers, and I'll talk to you."

"Only he might be at the Cape," said another of the sergeants, smiling.

"Or in India," said another; and there was a general laugh, which irritated the would-be recruit, and, feeling completely stunned by his reception, after taking it for granted that all he had to do was to hold out his hand when a shilling would be placed therein: after that he was a soldier.

Giving a sharp, comprehensive glance round, he turned upon his heels and walked away towards the entrance, feeling ready to go back indignantly, for there was a roar of laughter apparently at his expense.

"Am I such a contemptible-looking boy?" he thought; and then he felt better: for there was evidently someone following him, and the laughter was not at his expense, but at that of the man coming in his direction, for someone cried—

"Wait a bit, Lambert!"

"Yes; steady there, Dan'!"

"Hi! you sir, don't you stand anything. He eats and drinks more than is good for him already."

"I say, Brummy, take him to the King's Head, and we'll join you."

"Dan'l and Lambert," thought Richard. "Why, it's the fat sergeant coming after me; they're laughing at him!"

But he did not turn his head to see, only went steadily on towards the gate, with his pulses beating rapidly once more, for the hope rose now that this man had repented and was, perhaps, going to enlist him, after all. Telling himself that it would be better to seem careless and independent, he kept on to the gate, passed out, and heard the steps still behind him, but so close now that he noticed a rather thick breathing. Then he started as if thrilled by an electric touch, for there came in sharp tones—

"Hold hard, my lad!" and then, in military fashion, "Halt! Right about face!"

Richard obeyed the order on the instant, and in such thorough soldierly style that the fat sergeant stared.

"Humph! Volunteers!" he muttered: and then, coming close up, he looked pleasantly in the lad's face, and clapped him on the shoulder. "So you wanted to 'list, did you?" he said.

"Yes. Will you have me?"

"No, my lad," said the sergeant, smiling. "I only wanted a word with you before you go into the town. I don't want to pump you. We can see plain enough. We often get young customers like you."

"I didn't know I was too young," said Richard, hoarsely.

"Nobody said you were, my lad; but you're not our sort. We want a rougher breed than you."

"Very well," said Richard.

"No, it isn't, my lad. You take a bit of good advice: be off back home—sharp! Don't stop in the town here, or you'll get picked up. There's a lot outside ready to be down upon you, and they'll humbug and promise everything till they've sucked every shilling you've got out of you and made you sell your watch."

Richard's hand went sharply to his chain, and the sergeant laughed.

"I know what it is: bit of a row at home, and you've cut off to 'list; and, if you could have had your way, you'd have done what you'd have given anything to undo in a month."

There was something so frank and honest in the plump, good-humoured face before him that Richard's hand went out directly.

"Shake hands? Of course," said the sergeant, grasping the lad's. "White hand!—Ring on it!" he cried, laughing, "There! go back home."

Richard snatched his hand back, colouring deeply, like a girl.

"Thank you!" he said. "You mean well, sergeant; but you don't know all."

"And don't want to. There, don't stop in the town; get off at once."

"I'm going to have some dinner," said Richard. "Come and have something with me."

"Had mine, my lad," said the sergeant, laughing. "What's the use of me giving you good advice if you don't take it. There, good-bye, my lad. Banks was quite right."

He nodded, faced round, and marched away, leaving Richard Frayne gazing at the black future before him as he muttered—

"Beaten! Why did I fight my way out of the flood?"

His next thought made him shudder: for a river was below there in the town, and he had crossed a bridge, beneath which the deep water flowed fast to where there was oblivion and rest.

He spoke mentally once more:

"Why not?"

As Richard Frayne gazed after the fat sergeant he failed to see the ridiculously fat back in the tight jacket for somehow he was looking inside at the man's heart.

"But he does not know—he does not know," muttered the lad, as he turned now and walked back toward the town street, down which he hurried with the intention of finding a quiet place where he could have a meal, and turned at last into a coffee-house, where he ordered tea and bread-and-butter, drinking the former with avidity, for he was feverishly thirsty, but the first mouthful of food seemed as if it would choke him, and he took no more.

Half an hour later he had another cup of tea, for his thirst seemed greater, and after that he went and wandered about the town, finding most rest in the shade of the great ruined Castle Keep, where the jackdaws sailed round, and cawed at him as if they were old friends from Primchilsea who recognised him and called out to their companions that he was below.

"What should he do," he thought; "what should he do?" For his plan had been completely checked, and in the most unexpected way.

He was sick at heart and faint in body, but his spirit was not crushed. He had laid his hand to the plough, and if a hundred good-tempered well-meaning fat sergeants came or gave their advice he could not look back. No; he must sleep at Ratcham that night, and make for Quitnesbury in the morning. There was a cavalry dépôt there; and if he failed again, he could go on to Ranstone.

"There must be regiments where they would take me," he muttered, as he walked back toward the town in the pleasant sunny evening; and, as if attracted by the place, he made his way again towards the barracks, thinking of the fat sergeant, and in his utter loneliness feeling a yearning to meet him again for a friendly chat, if it were possible.

"What did they call him—Lambert?" thought Richard. "Absurd! That was only banter on the part of his companions. I wonder whether I shall ever see him again!"

Chapter Fifteen.

In Pipe-Claydom.

There was still none of the pageant and display of a military life visible to Richard as he re-entered the great gateway, before which a sentry in white flannel jacket and forage cap was marching to and fro with a bayonet in his hand, ready to give a glance at the lad and then turn upon his heels and march away.

The lad walked forward as if he had business there, and went on, wondering what the stout sergeant's name was, but not liking to stop and ask. Then on straight across the great dreary barrack yard, surrounded on all sides by bare-looking buildings, full of open windows, at one of which he saw a pair of folded arms and the top of a closely-cropped head, the owner thereof being evidently asleep. At another window there was a pair of boot-soles, and at another a man, in shirt and trousers, seated sidewise upon the sill, with his knees drawn up so as to form a reading-desk, upon which a paper was spread, which the man, with his hands behind his head, was perusing.

A little farther on there was a cat asleep, and just above it a canary in a cage twittering away as if in friendly discourse with the animal below. But for the most part the windows of the great barracks were unoccupied, and the place looked deserted and desolate in the extreme.

Richard walked on, thinking of what he was not long before, and of his present position through one turn of fortune's wheel. What was to happen next, now that he had been disappointed and his project had come to naught?

Right on before him there was another gateway, across which, in the soft summer evening light, a second sentry in white flannel jacket passed, with the light gleaming upon his triangular bayonet.

One moment he thought of turning back; the next he had rejected this, and advanced. He had taken his course, and he must go on.

The second sentry looked harder at him as he passed an open doorway from out of which came a puff of hot bad tobacco smoke; but the man seemed to pay no further heed as he went on and now found himself at what was evidently the front of the barracks, and directly afterward a burst of music fell upon his ears.

It sounded very welcome, and, walking in the direction, he passed a couple of large open windows, from whence came the clatter of silver upon china and the buzz of voices accompanied by sundry odours of an agreeable nature, which reminded him of the fact that he had eaten nothing since his hurried breakfast.

"The mess-room," he said to himself.

The officers were dining; and the band was playing selections during that function.

Richard passed on, thinking, and with his spirits going down like the mercury in a weather-glass before a storm.

In a short time he, in all probability, would have been an officer attached to some regiment, while now he was a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of the earth.

"Not even fit to be a private," he said to himself; and then, attracted by the music, he turned and walked back, to stop between the two windows, listening, and with the smell of the dinner making him forget his troubles in baser thoughts as his mouth began to water.

Then the chink of glasses began to mingle with the buzz of voices.

"Taking wine," muttered the listener; and he wondered whether it was Hock.

Pop!

"Champagne or Moselle," he muttered; and the report of a second cork taking flight from the bottle followed, and then a third, while the music went on.

There was a row of iron railings in front of the windows, and Richard turned his back and rested it against them; for he was tired, and it was pleasant to listen to the music and feel himself close to a party of gentlemen just for a few minutes before he

went back into the town to find out some place where he could get a meal and bed.

All at once, after a loud passage, the band wound up with a series of chords, leaving the principal flute-player sustaining one long note and then dropping to the octave below, from which he started upon a series of runs, paused, and commenced a solo full of florid passages introductory to a delicious melody—one of those plaintive airs which, once heard, cling evermore to the memory.

Dick was weary, faint, and in low spirits. The events of the past days seemed to fit themselves to the strain, till his brow wrinkled up, then grew full of knots, and he angrily muttered the word "Muff!" A few moments later he ejaculated "Duffer!" and then twisted himself suddenly round to look up at the open window from which, mingled with the loud conversation and rattle of plates, the music came.

"Oh, it's murder!" muttered the lad. "The fellow ought to be kicked!" and, as he listened, his hand went involuntarily into his breast-pocket, pressed the button in the side of the morocco flute-case, and extracted the little silver-keyed piccolo from where it reposed in purple velvet beside the two pieces of his flute.

And all the while the solo was continued, the player slurring over passages, omitting a whole bar, and seeming to be increasing his pace so as to take the final roulades at a break-neck gallop, and get through, somehow, without further accident.

But he did not; for, as he reached the beginning of a brilliant arpeggio, at the top of which there was a trill and a leap down of an octave and a half, the wind in the bellows of this human organ suddenly gave out, a few wildly chaotic notes elicited a roar of laughter from the table accompanied by derisive applause. This stopped as if by magic; for, suddenly, from out there by the railing, a few long thrilling shakes were heard, deliciously sweet and pure, followed by the arpeggio. The effect was as if liquid music was falling from the summer sky; and then the player ran back to the earlier part of the air, and, amidst perfect silence from within, on and on it ran, thrilling its hearers with appealing, impassioned tones, breathed by one who had forgotten where he was—everything but the fact that the glorious theme he loved had been cruelly murdered, and that he was bringing it back to life; for it was one of his favourite airs.

In the utter silence a window was softly opened somewhere higher up, then another and another, towards which the liquid, bird-like notes rose in plaintive, long-drawn appeals, to come trickling down again in runs—rising, falling, rising, falling, with a purity and strength which seemed impossible as coming from that tiny instrument. Finally this softened, grew lower and lower, till the last notes regularly died away in the distance. And then, and then only, in the midst of a roar of applause, Dick stood, piccolo in hand, as if he had been just woke up from a musical dream by a flannel-jacketed private, bearing a drawn bayonet, who said, savagely—

“Come out! You’ve no business here!”

“No, no, sentry; leave him alone!” said a loud voice; and Richard looked up, to see that the windows were full of officers, whose scarlet mess-vests, with their rows of tiny buttons, shone in the evening light. Higher up there were ladies looking down; and then the musician glanced sharply round and began to thrust his piccolo back into his breast-pocket.

“Hold hard, there!” cried the same voice, and Richard looked quickly up, to meet the dark eyes of a big, handsome, youngish man, who, napkin in hand, towered above the others, but turned sharply round, and Richard heard him say—

“May we have him in, sir?”

“Oh, yes!” came back in a quick, commanding voice, and the officer looked out again.

“Here!” he cried, “we want you to come in and play.”

“I—I beg your pardon—I—I—”

Dick got no further, for an officer’s servant was at his elbow, looking at him rather superciliously as he said—

“This way!”

Chapter Sixteen.

“You meant it, then?”

For one moment Richard flinched, and thought of making a run for it; the next he was following the man.

"Why not?" he muttered. "I may as well, if they want me to. Why not play for my living now?"

The next minute, with the feeling of shrinking gone, he was standing in the mess-room, in one corner of which, partially hidden by a screen and some palms, was the band, while close to him, leaning back in his chair, was a fine, florid-looking, grey officer, evidently the colonel or major of the regiment, while the rest of the officers had resumed their places, and the dinner was going on.

"Well, sir," said the elderly, florid officer, with assumed sternness, as he fixed the lad with his keen grey eyes, "what have you to say for yourself? How are you come here and interrupt the most brilliant player in my band?"

There was a roar of laughter from all present, and Richard was conscious of a sharp face belonging to a bandsman peering between the palm-leaves.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the lad, frankly, "but I stopped to hear the music; the air was very familiar, and I had my instrument in my pocket, and—well, sir, that's all."

"Oh!" said the old officer, scanning him sharply; "then you are not a street musician?"

"I, sir? Oh, no," cried Richard—"that is, I don't know; I suppose I shall be."

"Humph! Well, you played that piece from the *Trovatore* capitally. The gentlemen here would like to hear something else—er—I should, too. Know any other airs?"

"A few, sir."

"Mind playing?"

"Not to so appreciative an audience," came to the lad's lips; but he only said, "Oh, no, sir."

"Go on, then. Here, Johnson, give the musician a glass of wine. By the way, Lacey, you were going to tell us a story about something."

The big, good-looking officer smiled, shook his head, and wrinkled up his forehead in a perplexed way as he looked up at the ceiling.

"The flute-player blew it all out of his head, sir," said a rather fierce-looking man who took the foot of the table, and there was another laugh.

At that moment the band at the end of the great mess-room recommenced playing, but there were cries of "No! no!" headed by the officer at the head.

But the band heard nothing but their own instruments, and Richard stood looking on, feeling faint and more weary than ever, and paying no heed to the glass of champagne the servant had placed upon a side-table near him, for he had been busy fitting together his flute.

"Go and tell them to leave off," said the old officer, and one of the servants hurried to the corner and checked the players, who could now be seen whispering together.

"Now, Mr Wandering Minstrel," said the officer at the foot, "we are all attention."

Dick's brow knit a little. "Mr Wandering Minstrel," in such a tone, jarred upon him, and a peculiar trembling came over him as he felt that he had forgotten everything. The table, with its plate and glass, looked misty, too, and there was a singing in his ears as his fingers played nervously with the keys of the instrument.

"Now, sir, if you please," said the old officer, and Richard gave a start, raised the flute to his lips, and blew a few feeble notes as he vainly tried to collect himself—conscious, too, now that the bandsmen were craning forward to listen.

Then he dimly saw that bent heads were being turned at the table, and that he was being eyed curiously, till, in a fit of desperation, he pressed the flute to his lips and blew again, if anything, more feebly; but the sound of the notes seemed to send a thrill through his nerves, and the next came deep, rich-toned, and pure, as he ran through a prelude, from which he imperceptibly glided into a sweet old Irish melody. He played it with such earnestness and feeling that his hearers were electrified, and the applause came again loudly, amidst which he dashed off into a series of variations, bright, sad, martial, and wailing, till, as he played, the room swam round him, the

terrible scene in the river rose, followed by that with his cousin, and then he seemed to be hearing the thundering of the water once more in his ears—

He was on the floor, gazing up in the face of a stranger, who was upon his knee, while other faces kept on appearing, as it were, out of a mist.

"Faintness, I should say," said the officer who knelt by him. "Give me that glass of wine. Here, my lad, try and drink some of this."

As if in a dream, the lad involuntarily swallowed the wine, and then, in a sharp, snatchy way, cried—

"What is it? What is the matter? What are you doing?"

"Have you been ill?" said the gentleman by him.

"Ill? No!" said Richard, huskily. "I don't understand."

"What have you eaten to-day?"

"Nothing—yes: a bit of bread."

"And yesterday?"

Richard was silent for a few moments, trying to collect himself. Then he recalled the past. "I don't know," he said.

"Well, Doctor?"

"Faint from excitement and want of food, sir," said the doctor. "Shall I prescribe here?"

"Do I ever fight against your wishes?" said the old officer.

"Then come and sit down over here, my lad," said the doctor, quietly; and he helped his wondering patient to a table close to where the bandsmen were seated.

"Here, one of you," he said, sharply, "fetch a plate of that soup, and some bread;" and, as the dinner went on, the doctor stayed and saw that the patient took the medicine, which he followed with half a glass more wine.

"You will not feel it now," he said, kindly. "Here, Wilkins, keep an eye upon him, will you, while I go back to the table? He is not to leave until I have seen him again."

"Very good, sir," said a pale little man in spectacles, who was evidently the leader of the band; and when the doctor went to his place, leaving his patient seated at the side-table, feeling as if he were in a dream, Wilkins carried out his orders with military precision; for, every time a piece was played, he conducted in regular musical fashion, flourishing a little ebony baton, and turning over the leaves of the book before him on the stand, but never once glancing at the notes, his eyes, glimmering through his glasses, being fixed upon the lad, to whom the scene appeared more dreamlike than ever, and his head grew confused, with familiar airs buzzing in one ear and the loud conversation in the other.

And this went on till the last piece upon the band programme of the evening had been finished amid thin clouds of smoke. Then the men began to place their instruments in their cases and green baize bags, after the different brass crooks had been drained and blown through, while a boy gathered together the music; and Richard started out of his dream, feeling better, and knowing that he must go.

At that moment he became conscious that the bandmaster was standing stiffly close by, still keeping an eye upon him, and removing his military cap, revealing a shiny billiard-ball-like head, which he began to polish softly with a silk handkerchief.

Richard, in his nervous state, felt worried and annoyed by this persistent gaze; but he bore it till he could bear it no longer, for the man stared as if he were some street beggar he had to watch for fear of his meddling with the plate.

"I beg your pardon—" began the lad; but he was interrupted by steps behind him, and the doctor cried—

"Well, sir—better?"

Richard started up and faced round, to find that the keen eyes of the colonel were also fixed upon him, looking as if their owner was waiting to hear what he said.

"Yes, sir; I'm better now," said the lad, hurriedly. "I am sorry to have been so much trouble."

"Who are you?—what's your name?" said the colonel, sharply.

"Smithson—Dick Smithson, sir," said the lad, feeling the blood come hotly into his cheeks as he spoke; and his face grew hotter, for he could see at a glance that he was not believed.

"What brought you here?" continued the colonel.

"I came to enlist, sir," said Dick, quickly.

"And the sergeant would not have you because you were too boyish, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Quite right, too! Where do you come from?"

There was no reply, and the colonel frowned.

"Where are you going to-night?"

Dick shook his head, and the colonel frowned again.

"Well, I have no right to inquire, I suppose, but you are not fit to go on tramp again to-night, my lad," continued the colonel, kindly; "and you had better mind where you go to sleep. Those instruments of yours are good, are they not?"

"Oh, yes," said Dick, eagerly; "they are both of the best make."

"And you have practised a great deal?"

"Oh, yes, sir—a great deal."

"Doesn't it seem strange to you, then, that a decentish-looking young fellow, who can play well, should be regularly on tramp and coming to enlist?"

"Yes, sir, very."

"Well, he had better stay here to-night—eh, Doctor?"

"Most advisable," said the keen-looking surgeon.

"Wilkins, you had better take charge of your fellow-musician," said the colonel.

"Yes, sir," came in rather an offended tone, which the colonel noticed.

"He had better go with the bandsmen, perhaps; he would be more comfortable.—Look here, sir, I shall make inquiries about you. Come to enlist, eh? Wouldn't care to join our band, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir!" cried Dick, eagerly.

"Beg pardon, sir, we are quite full," said the bandmaster, importantly.

"Of what, Mr Wilkins?" said the colonel, sternly. "Incompetents? I am not much of a judge, sir, but I know enough music to be able to say that ours is one of the worst bands in the army. I shall have inquiries made about this Richard or Dick Smithson, and, if the results are favourable, he had better stay. See that he is looked after for the night!"

The colonel sauntered off; followed by the doctor, and Dick stood gazing after him, wondering whether they would find out who he was and whence he came, when the bandmaster said in an ill-used tone of voice—

"Here, you had better come with me!" and he led the way to the portion of the barracks which formed the bandsmen's quarters, where Dick passed the night.

"Eh? No! Why, it is! Well, I'm blessed!"

The fat sergeant's ejaculations when, one morning, Dick Smithson, the new recruit to the band, hurried up to take his place with the awkward squad and learn a sufficiency of the drill to carry himself correctly and march with the men.

"How in the world did you manage it, my lad? Here, I know: you were the chap who played in the mess. Well, how are you? There, fall in!" cried the sergeant, suddenly altering his tone and manner. "We'll have a talk by-and-by."

For the next hour or two Dick was going through the customary instruction, and being barked at with the rest, ordered here and there, made to perform the balance-step, and put through his facings generally. The sergeant bullied him in the time-worn style, and stared at him as if he had never seen him before, till the recruits were drawn up in line, hot, weary and worried; for, though the stout sergeant was not very active, he did not spare himself, much less the fresh, raw lads he was drilling into shape.

Then, after some exceedingly severe strictures, he turned suddenly to Dick.

"Here you, Number Fourteen; you've been through all this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hah! Taught by some clumsy worn-out duffer who belonged to the old school! You've a lot to learn, my lad, but you needn't stop with this rough lot; you can drill with one of the regular squads."

Some of the men turned to look sourly at the new recruit, and were yelled at by the sergeant.

"Eyes front!" he roared. "Keep your heads up there! I'm speaking to Number Four from the left, not to you! Steady there! Right face! Dis—miss!"

The rank was broken, and, as the tired squad hurried off to the barrack-room, the sergeant drew his cane from under his arm, and called to Dick, the stern, rigid look giving place to a pleasant, cheery smile as he shook hands.

"You meant it, then?" he said.

"Yes, I meant it," replied Dick, smiling back.

"Well, I'm glad to see you, my lad. Don't you take no notice of what I said before those louts. You're all right; you'll have to go through the course, but I can soon report you as being pretty perfect. You could hold your own now with most of the fellows in the band."

"I think I can soon get on," said Dick, who felt glad of a friendly word.

"Of course you can. You well-educated chaps know your right leg from your left; lots of these fellows never seem to. You'll be all right there in the band."

He nodded and walked away, while Dick was soon after obeying the dinner call, and forcing himself to bear his grievance, as he sat down to partake of the roughly-cooked coarse beef and potatoes which formed the day's rations, and wondered how long it would be before he grew hardened to his new life and able to forget the many little refinements and luxuries to which he had been accustomed.

Chapter Seventeen.

Quavering among Crotchets.

"It is very horrid in some things," thought Dick Smithson as he would think of his position at night in the comparative silence of his narrow bed—comparative silence, for each of his brother bandsmen had a habit of performing nocturnes on nasal instruments in a way not pleasing to a weary, sleepless person—"very horrid."

For so many things jarred: the want of privacy, the common ways of his companions, the roughness of the food, and the annoyances—petty annoyances—he had to submit to from the little bandmaster.

But Dick did not repent. He was Dick now—Dick Smithson—even to himself; and after the first few days, far from repenting the wild step he had taken, he rejoiced in the calm rest which seemed to have come over him. There was no one to accuse him of dishonourableness, to remind him of the death of his cousin, no relations to meet who would reproach him for all that he had done.

There was ease at night, so little time for thought. The military routine kept him busy; and as he had embraced this life, he worked like a slave to master his duties, and the time rapidly glided by.

There was always a smile for him whenever he met the big sergeant, while the others he had encountered that first day were ready with a friendly nod.

There was a band practice one afternoon, and Dick took his place with the rest, listening to the men, who, whatever their instrument, began to run through difficult bits regardless of their neighbours; but there was only one person present whom this chaos of wild sounds affected—to wit, the recruit, who listened with an intense longing to ram his fingers in his ears, as one man began to cut and slash out notes from the trombone in the key of G; while another practised difficult runs in E flat upon the clarionet, another ran through a strain in F upon the cornet, and the hautbois-performer, the bassoon, the contra-bass, and the keyed-trumpet toiled away in major, minor, flat, sharp, or in whatever key his music might be set.

The bewildering, maddening row—it deserved no other term—went on till the bandmaster, looking mildly important in his spectacles, entered the room, walked up to his stand—across which a baton had been laid—gave a sharp tap, and there was instant silence, broken, however, by sundry dull pops, as men drew the crooks out of their brass instruments, and drained away the condensed breath.

“We’ll try that march from *Forst* again,” said the bandmaster; and the men began to turn over the leaves of their music, while others adjusted the cards ready upon their brass instruments.

Dick stood by the regular flute-player, who, rather grudgingly, made room at his tall stand; and then, as the bandmaster called attention with a fresh tap of the baton and opened the score, the flautist said:

“Beg pardon, Mr Wilkins, sir; here’s the recruit. Is he to stand with me?”

Dick waited, curious to hear what followed, and incensed at what did; for, when the bandmaster entered, he had glanced sharply at the now bandsman, and then passed on.

“Eh! what recruit?” said the little leader, looking up and giving a start as he made believe to see Dick for the first time. “Oh, that young man? Well, perhaps he had better stand by you, and then he may pick up what he can. This is a difficult piece.”

“I know Gounod’s work pretty well, sir,” said Dick, quietly.

“Oh, do you!” said the bandmaster, with a little jerky laugh, like that of a spiteful woman. “Now, then; what’s your name, sir?”

“Smithson,” said Dick, feeling as if he would like to kick the mean-spirited little cad.

“Oh, Smithson, eh?—son of the great Smith!”

He looked round, twinkling, for a laugh to follow what he meant for a joke; and the obsequious bandsmen uttered a sniggering kind of concreted grin, followed instantly by a loud-toned sonorous *Phoomp!* from the huge bell-mouth of the contra-bass.

“What do you mean by that, Banks?” cried the bandmaster, as soon as there was silence, for the men had burst into a loud and general roar.

"Beg pardon, sir; I was listening, sir," said the offender. "It was only one of those deep notes I was doubtful about."

"Then don't you let it occur again, sir! It was an excuse for a marked show of disrespect, and I won't have it! Here is the colonel complaining about the inefficiency of our band, and people are saying that the 310th is far better—which is a lie, a ridiculous lie—but I want to know how our band is to become efficient if there is not more discipline maintained?"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"Silence, sir! Attend to what I say! I have long noted a want of attention among the men—a mutinous spirit—and I won't allow it! While I'm bandmaster, I'll be treated with proper respect; and, mark this, our band shall be efficient, and the members shall practise till they are!"

He tapped the music-stand sharply, raised his baton, and then went on talking.

"Here, you!" he cried. "Smithson, didn't you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you say?"

"Smithson, sir."

"How dare you!" yelled the bandmaster, scarlet now with passion, for the men burst out laughing again. "Don't you try to crack your miserable, contemptible jokes on me, sir!"

"That was no joke, sir," said Dick.

"No, sir, it was not!" said the bandmaster, sharply. "You'll find jokes dangerous things to crack here, sir!"

There was a murmur of acquiescence, and the little man smiled approval.

"Thought you were alluding to my name, sir," said Dick, apologetically.

"Indeed, sir?" said the bandmaster, sarcastically. "Not such an attractive name that I would care to allude to it."

"Oh, you meant about the music of *Faust*, sir?" said Dick, pronouncing the name of the opera as a German would—something like *Fowst*.

"The music of what?" said the bandmaster, screwing up his face as if the sound were unpleasant to his ears.

"Gounod's opera, sir, I said. I know it pretty well."

"Dear me! you seem to know everything 'pretty well;' perhaps you know how to conduct 'pretty well,' and would like to take my stick and lead?"

Dick looked down at the music, but made no reply, though the bandmaster waited for a few moments.

"Then I suppose I may go on. Of course, the colonel has a right to interfere, though I was not aware that he was a musician; and I think I have had some little experience in musical matters, and if I had proper material I could produce as good results as any man in the service; but, hampered as I am by incompetents, and interfered with in matters of which I ought to be the best judge, I don't know what can be expected, I'm sure.—The March from *Forst*."

There was a sharp tapping of the baton, and Dick drew back to go and sit down, when the spectacles glistened in his direction again.

"Keep your place, sir," shouted the little tyrant. "You can, as you are here, try the flute part. Be careful!"

Dick felt a singing in his ears, and his fellow-flautist scowled.

Then there was a flourish of the leader's stick in the air, and the brass instruments set off in the familiar march, every man blowing his loudest, and keeping very fair, well-marked time, to the end of the strain, to be followed by the *piano* movement, in which the flutes took the lead, with hautbois and clarionet, of course properly supported by the bass.

There was a peculiar jarring in Dick's ears before the second bar was played; and, before they were half-way through eight, the conductor's stick was tapping the music-stand fiercely.

"Stop! stop! stop!" he yelled. "My good fellow, this won't do; you're flat—horribly flat!"

Richard stood with his eyes fixed upon his music, expecting to see his companion alter the tuning-slide of his flute; but the man waited, with a supercilious smile upon his face, and the leader went on—

“Do you hear, you Smithson? That’s horribly flat. Now, then, blow A.”

Dick raised his instrument and blew a pure, clear note in perfect tune.

“Not that one; harder; your upper A.”

A note an octave higher rang out pure and clear.

“That’s better! Now begin again: the soft movement, please.”

Mr Wilkins waved his wand, and a fresh start was made, but it was more melancholy than the first. It sounded as if the women gathered in the marketplace to welcome the return of the German warriors had set up a howl of misery, which was ended by the crack of the conductor’s stick.

“Stop! stop! stop!” he yelled. “You are blowing out of tune, sir! This is horrible! we cannot have a row like cats in the band!”

This was a legitimate occasion for mirth, so the men laughed, and Mr Wilkins looked pleased and the spectacles twinkled.

“Now, again; and be careful, sir, if you are to play with us. Now, then!”

Down came the baton, two bars were played, and the result was so much worse that the bandmaster banged his music-stand frantically.

“Stand back, sir!” he yelled. “This is ridiculous! What does the colonel mean? What do you mean, sir, by pretending you know the music? What? What’s that you say?”

“I said ‘I beg pardon,’ sir,” began Dick.

“Beg pardon! Why, you are an impostor, sir; and if you are to stop here, I shall resign!—What?”

“I only wanted to say, sir,” continued Dick, quietly, “that this last time I didn’t blow a note.”

"Well, of all the impudence! Then, pray, sir, what was the meaning of that hideous discord?"

"I don't know, sir. I presume that someone's instrument is not in tune."

"Someone's instrument not in tune!" cried the bandmaster. "Here, Jones, Morris, Bigham, run through half a dozen bars."

He waved his wand, and the three musicians blew together without the bass and tenor instruments, with a worse effect than ever, and the listening brasses burst out into a fresh roar of laughter; while Dick had hard work, in his triumph, to suppress a smile.

"Then it's you, Jones!"

"No, sir," said the flute-player. "I'm all right!"

"You can't be!" cried the other two men, indignantly.

"He's playing in the wrong key," said the first.

"That I ain't!" cried the flute-player. "I'm all right, I tell you! It was the new chap."

"How could it be the new chap when he was *not* blowing, idiot?" cried the bandmaster, angrily, trying hard to hedge and preserve his character for consistency. "Here, you Smithson, run through those few bars with the others. No; not you, Jones."

The flautist sulkily lowered his flute, while the theme was now played as a trio with admirable effect.

"Humph! not bad—not bad at all," said Wilkins, as a murmur of satisfaction arose from the men.

Meanwhile, the flautist was turning over his flute and glancing from it to the beautiful instrument Dick held.

"Now," cried the leader, "run through that again, Jones—or, no, with the clarionet."

He beat time and the two instruments sounded; but, at the end of the first bar, the clarionet-player took the reed from his lips.

"'Tain't good enough, sir!" he said.

"Good enough!" cried Wilkins, angrily; "it's disgraceful!"

"Yer never thought it disgraceful till this new chap come," cried the discomfited flute-player. "Who's to play proper on a thing like this? Look at his!"

"Hold your tongue, stoopid!" whispered the nearest man. "You'll be getting yourself in a row."

"Look at his flute!" cried Wilkins. "Why, he'd get more music out of a tin whistle than you would out of his. Here, you Smithson, see what you can do with that flute. Now, my lads, once again."

Dick took Jones's flute unwillingly for more than one reason. He felt that he was making an enemy of the man; but there was no time for hesitation, and, as they struck up, he played his part admirably upon the strange instrument, and then stood waiting.

"Give him his flute," said Wilkins, shortly. "Don't you go abusing our band instruments again, young man, or you'll be finding yourself sent back to the ranks. Now, please, we're losing time."

And so the practice went on Dick, feeling that he was making enemies all round till, about an hour after, when he was in the long-room, and half a dozen of the bandsmen came in together, looked at him, then at one another, and one of them said—

"I'm glad you've joined."

"We've been thinking it over, and we're going to see if we can't work up some better music now. Never you mind about Wilkins; his bark's worse than his bite."

"And he likes to show off," said another. "Wants people to think what a clever one he is. We'll have some quiet practices together, if you like."

"I shall be very glad," said Dick eagerly.

"That's right, and you can give us a few hints. Wilkins turned nasty through that snubbing he got over yonder, at the mess-room, but he'll soon come round. I'm sorry, though, about old Jones."

"So am I," cried Dick; "I quite felt for him this afternoon."

"Yes, he never ought to have been put to music. I hope he won't turn nasty," said the first speaker, "for he's got a temper of his own. But, there, you needn't mind him."

"No," thought Dick, "I need not mind him; but I don't like making enemies, all the same."

Chapter Eighteen.

Dick finds a Pupil.

"No one would know me now," said the recruit to himself one morning as he glanced at his face in a piece of looking-glass, for the military barber had been operating upon his head, and had—as the *Punch* man said in the hot weather in allusion to his hair—"cut it to the bone."

For the first time Richard Frayne dressed in his tightly-fitting, stiff uniform.

"Hallo, Flutey!" said one of the men; "I was looking for you. Got 'em on, then?"

"Yes," said Dick, smiling. "Do they fit?"

"Oh, yes, pretty tidy. Feel all right?"

"No; I don't think I can get my hand up level with my mouth, and the tunic feels as if it would split up the back, and the buttons go flying, the first time I move."

"Oh, that'll be all right. Sure to feel a bit stiff at first. I say, he has padded you out well in the chest and over the shoulders."

"Yes, far too much."

"Not a bit of it. Makes you look broader-chested and square-shouldered—more of the man. But, here, Lieutenant Lacey wants you up at his quarters. Sent that chuckle-headed Joe Todd, his servant, to fetch you directly."

"What does he want?" cried Dick, aghast with the idea that something had been found out.

"Go and ask him."

"But I must change first."

"Nonsense! Go as you are. You've got to wear the red now," added the man, with a grin.

Dick went down into the barrack yard, to find the lieutenant's servant waiting, and followed him, with the peculiar tremor increasing, and a cold, dank perspiration breaking out about his temples and in the palms of his hands.

A few minutes after he was ushered into the handsomely-furnished rooms which formed the lieutenant's quarters; and he felt a pang shoot through him for the moment as the piano in one corner, and some music and a flute upon the table, recalled his own rooms at Draycott's.

But his thoughts were back directly to his troubles, and he felt a kind of momentary relief on finding that there was no one in the sitting-room.

"I'll go and tell him you're here," said the man who had fetched him, and he lifted a curtain, caught his foot against a fold, stumbled, and drove his head with a crash against the panel of the door beyond. Then, as the curtain fell behind him, Dick heard, in smothered tones:—

"I had you out of the ranks, Joe Todd, for my servant; I don't want a battering-ram."

"Beg pardon, sir. Haxident."

"Accident! That's the third time you have done it within a week. Torn the curtain?"

"No, sir; don't think so. Hurt my head."

"I don't believe it, Joe. A wooden door could not hurt your head! You may have cracked the panel!"

"No, sir; all right, sir."

"Then take those clothes and brush them again. The trousers have mud-splashes as high as the knees. And take those boots, too; I can't wear them like that."

The man came out of the inner room with a portion of his master's uniform under his arm and a pair of boots, swinging by the tags, one of which badly-cleaned articles he dropped in

trying to open the outer door, the handle of which Dick turned for him, so that he could pass out.

As Dick closed the door he was conscious of a rustling behind him, and he turned smartly, to find himself face to face with the great lieutenant, gorgeous now in shawl-pattern smoking-trousers and purple velvet lounging-coat.

"Now for it!" he thought.

"And you might have been an officer," said the lieutenant, shaking his head at Dick sadly, while all the blood in the lad's body seemed to run to his heart.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," faltered Dick, as he began to think that he would have to get away again, and then recalled the fact that he could not without being looked upon as a deserter.

"I said 'And you might have been an officer.'"

"Yes," said Dick bitterly, and turning and speaking as he felt that he was driven to bay.

"I'm glad you feel it," said the lieutenant, letting himself sink down into a lounge.

"I do, sir—bitterly," replied Dick.

"If I were not as patient as a lamb, I should have kicked him out of the place a year ago. Of course, it didn't matter before you, but it might have been the colonel or the major; and, though there is a way out through my bedroom, that blundering ass must bring my boots and clothes through my sitting-room!"

Dick felt as if he had been respited after condemnation, and began to breathe freely.

"You heard him run his head against the door, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"But it wouldn't break; everything else does. He'll ruin me before he has done.—I have sent for you, Smithson," said the lieutenant, "because I want you to give me some lessons on the flute."

"Oh, with pleasure, sir," began Dick. "I—I beg your pardon, sir. Of course, if you wish it."

"I hope it will be with pleasure, Smithson," said the lieutenant, smiling; "but I'm afraid it will not be; for, between ourselves, I am very dull over music."

"I used to think I was, sir," said Dick; "but I worked hard till I could play a bit."

"A bit!" said the lieutenant, smiling. "Ah, well, I won't flatter you. I should like you to come often and play with me—duets and pieces. The fact is, Smithson, I want to perform something in—in—in public one evening—a duet. I have been thinking that I might play the first part and you the second. What do you think?"

"I think the same as you do, sir," said Dick. "When would you like to begin?"

"Well, the fact is, Smithson, I am rather pressed for time."

"I will come in at any hour you appoint, sir—that is, if there is no band practice."

"Oh, the colonel will speak to Wilkins about that, Smithson; but you do not understand me. I have plenty of time, but I am pressed—anxious to play a duet or two as soon as possible."

"I understand, sir," said Dick, scanning the handsome face and athletic mould of the young officer, as the feeling grew upon him that the former was what some people would call rather mild; "but I am no teacher, would you like Mr Wilkins to give you some lessons?"

"No, Smithson," said the lieutenant; "that I really should not. I want you, and I want you to treat all this as confidential."

"But it is sure to be known, sir."

"That you are giving me lessons, yes; but not the style of lesson. When could you begin?"

Dick glanced at the flute.

"Would you like a lesson now, sir?"

"Yes, exactly; but you have no instrument."

"But you have, sir; and I could help you better without."

"I'm afraid not, Smithson. You see, I should want to hear the air played at the same time."

"I could run that through as an accompaniment on the piano."

"You could?" cried the lieutenant, staring.

"Well enough, perhaps, for that, sir."

"Then, let's begin at once."

"Have you selected an air, sir?"

"Well—er—yes," faltered the great fellow. "I have—er—chosen two—duets. Here they are."

He handed the music, and Dick took it up, glancing at each piece in turn; while the young officer looked warm and uncomfortable, watching his visitor uneasily.

"'Flow on, thou Shining River;' 'Oh, Happy, Happy Fair!'" read Dick. "Both beautiful melodies;" and, taking the former, he crossed to the piano and ran through the melody, and then the accompaniment, with plenty of expression; while the lieutenant sat upon his chair with his eyes glistening from excitement.

"Now this piece," he cried; and Dick ran through the second.

"Why, Smithson," cried the lieutenant, "you are a wonderful musician! I—I'm afraid that you will be ready to laugh at me."

"Oh, no, sir. Now, then—I suppose your flute is of the right pitch?"

"I—er—think so."

"Try, sir."

Dick struck the chord of the key in which the piece was set, and the young officer blew a note of a most uncertain sound.

"Fully a quarter of a tone out, sir," said Dick, thoroughly in earnest now over his task. "Shall I alter the slide, sir?"

"If you please."

Dick altered the slide again and again till his pupil blew the note in perfect accord, and then they began, with the air played

slowly out of time—a most feeble performance—right to the end of the strain, when the lieutenant lowered his flute, and looked at his master with a rather pitiful, but comically perplexed, expression.

“Horribly bad, isn’t it?” he said.

“Well, it might be a good deal better, sir.”

“Yes, of course. Will you be good enough to run through it?”

“No, sir; I think it would be better not. I want to encourage you—not discourage; of course, I could play it more perfectly, but then I have practised for years.”

“Yes; I suppose so.”

“But I can make you play that twice as well in a week.”

“Do you think so?” cried the lieutenant, eagerly.

“I’m sure of it, sir. Now, again, please. I’ll play each note on the piano, and I want you to blow that note firmly and with a full breath. Never mind about time, blow each note as if it were a minim, giving a breath to each.”

It was a complete change of position, the officer diligently obeying his subordinate, and working hard, if with no brilliant effect, till quite a couple of hours had passed, when he laid down his flute.

“I shall never do it.”

Dick smiled.

“You shall do it, sir,” he cried. “I’ll make you.”

“You will, Smithson? Ah! if you only can! When will you come again? I want to play it so very badly.”

“To-morrow, sir,” said Dick; and he went back toward his quarters, wondering why the lieutenant wanted to play those two old-fashioned airs.

“Surely he does not want to serenade someone.”

Dick laughed quite cheerily as he thought of the lieutenant’s handsome face, and the idea tickled him for the moment; but

the next moment he sighed and felt angry with himself for his mirthful display, and forgot the lieutenant's lessons till the next day.

Chapter Nineteen.

The Night of the Serenade.

Those lessons given to the lieutenant were the plus to the minus of Dick Smithson's existence, for the young officer grew daily more friendly and confidential. He chatted about his brother-officers and the dinner parties to which he was invited, rapidly forgetting the gap between them in their military status so long as they were alone, and insisted upon paying liberally for each lesson as it was given.

This Dick felt at first disposed to resent, but the lieutenant looked at him with so much surprise that he ended by taking his professional fee, and no more was ever said upon that point.

One day there was a scented note upon the table; another day, in a bashful, girlish way, which accorded strangely with the young officer's great, manly aspect, there was a hint let fall; and before long Dick smiled to himself as he felt certain that he had been right in his guess as to the purpose for which the lessons were being taken.

Then came a morning when Dick walked across the barrack yard, thinking of how thoroughly he had obliterated himself from the memory of all who knew him, and the past from his own. But, as he approached the lieutenant's quarters, he drove these thoughts away and ascended the stairs, to stop on the landing, for he could hear a voice talking loudly.

"Company!" thought Dick, and he was about to turn back, but the voice rose higher, and he became aware of the fact that there was what an Irishman would call "a one-sided quarrel" going on. As he came close to the door this became more evident, for he could hear the lieutenant, striding about the room, storming angrily.

"Joe Todd seems to have fetched himself hot water this morning," said Dick to himself, for Lacey was calling his servant by every name suggestive of stupidity that he could think of, but all in the most calmly, dignified manner.

"I beg your pardon, Smithson," he said, as the man left the room. "I ought not to go on like that, but the fellow really is beyond bearing. I can't trust him to do a single thing. He either forgets or does it wrong. He burns my wet boots; he folds my clothes so that they are always in creases; he leaves the stopper out of my scent; upsets the scented bear's grease over my dress-clothes; and—and—Oh, I can't think of half the mischief he has done! Oh, dear me! there never was a man worried as I am.—Now, about this duet, Smithson. Do you think we can manage?—the fact is, I want it for a serenade on Friday night."

"If you will only play it as well, sir, as you did at the last lesson, it will be all right," said Dick, smiling to himself.

"Think so? I'm afraid I must seem very stupid to you, Smithson—such a musician as you are. Really, you are a mystery to me."

Dick made no reply.

"There, I beg your pardon, Smithson; it's just as if I were trying to pump you about your past, and I assure you I did not mean to. It would be so ungentlemanly."

"Lieutenant Lacey is always gentlemanly to me," said Dick, quietly.

"Well, so are you to me, Smithson. Really, I begin to look upon you as quite a friend."

"It is very kind of you, sir."

"Well, it's your way, Smithson. Never had lessons in music before without the fellow I took them of trying to make all the money he could out of me, bothering me to buy pieces of music, or instruments, or something. Well, let's begin. But one moment, Smithson; you really are keeping this a profound secret—I mean about the serenade?"

"I wish you would have a better opinion of me, sir," said Dick.

"I couldn't—I couldn't, really, Smithson," cried the lieutenant; "but the fact is, I am so nervous about it. If it were known in the regiment, I should never hear the last of it."

"It will not be known through me, sir," said Dick, quietly, as he arranged a couple of pieces of music on the stands.

"Of course, it will not, Smithson," cried the lieutenant, rather warmly. "You see, I'm afraid I'm rather weak, and the fellows like to chaff me. I don't mind much; but I can't help wishing Nature had made me less good-looking and given me some more brains."

Dick glanced at the fine, handsome fellow, and the lieutenant caught his eye.

"Ah! now you're going to laugh at me because I talked about being good-looking."

"Why should I?" said Dick, honestly. "You are the best-looking fellow—I beg pardon, sir, the best-looking officer—in the regiment."

"I am," said the lieutenant, frankly, "and the biggest and strongest, as I've often proved; but what's the good of that, Smithson, when you're the greatest duffer? The colonel and the major both like me."

"And there isn't a man in the regiment who wouldn't do anything for you, sir."

"I suppose not, Smithson; but, as I was going to say, if the colonel and the major didn't like me, I should always be in hot water, for I'm horribly stupid over the movements.—Ready?"

"Quite, sir."

"Then let's begin. There! I've forgotten it all, and I get so nervous my fingers grow quite damp. Now, then, to begin."

Dick beat a bar, raised his flute, and blew a note.

"I beg your pardon," said the lieutenant; "I was not quite ready. Again, please."

A fresh start was made, and in his nervousness the officer was too soon.

Then a couple more starts were made, and the lieutenant laid down his flute.

"It's no good!" he cried, pitifully. "I always seem to make a fool of myself in everything I attempt."

"You only want confidence, sir," said Dick. "Try again."

The flute was taken up, and, after a good many stumbles, the duet was run through very badly.

"I think you had better play the first part, and I'll take the second, Smithson."

"But you have studied the first part, sir, and you don't know anything about the second."

"No," said the lieutenant, plaintively; "but if the second broke down, it wouldn't be of so much consequence. Look here, Smithson, you are so strong at all this sort of thing; couldn't you give me a lift with a note or two?—I shall only break down."

"You will not break down, sir," cried Smithson. "You said Friday night, didn't you?"

"Yes, Friday; but that's an unlucky day, isn't it?"

"Old women say so, sir; and I've been as unfortunate on other days. You shall do it somehow. I'll make you."

"Thank you, Smithson. But I'm afraid she will not think much of it."

"Why not, sir? The duet is sweetly pretty, and music sounds very soft and attractive in the silence of the night."

"To be sure—so it does!"

"And if the lady cares for you, she is certain to be pleased."

"Yes, Smithson; but I don't know that she does. Now let's rest for a few minutes. It's so awkward for that fellow to have upset me just before I had my music lesson. I wish I knew of a good man; I'd give anything for him."

The Friday night came, and at a time appointed Dick crossed the barrack yard, to find it soft, delicious, and summer-like, starry but dark, and with a feeling in the air which accorded well with the mission they were on.

On reaching the lieutenant's room, he found him impatiently walking up and down, smoking a cigarette—the ends of half a dozen more lying on the fire-grate ornament.

"Come—come, Smithson! you are late," cried the young officer impatiently. "It will be so vexatious to find nobody stirring. People do go to sleep when they are in bed."

"Generally, sir. But you said half-past ten, to be the time."

"Yes; and for you to be here by ten."

"Exactly, sir; but I thought I would get here half an hour sooner, in case you liked to try through the piece before we started."

"Eh? What time is it, then?"

"Just about to chime half-past nine, sir."

Dick had hardly uttered the words before the barrack clock chimed twice.

"Surely that's not half-past ten," cried the lieutenant excitedly, as he snatched out his watch. "Dear me, no! I'm an hour out in my calculations. Yes; let's try over the piece."

The flutes were produced, and the duet was whispered through, as it were; and at the end Dick applauded softly.

"Yes, that's very kind of you," said Lacey; "but I don't feel satisfied. By the way, Smithson, you must not go like that. Your red jacket will be so conspicuous."

"What can I do, sir?"

"Would you mind wearing one of my light overcoats, Smithson? It will be rather large for you, but so effectual in hiding your military character."

"I shall not mind it," said Dick, though he could not help wincing a little at the idea; and soon after, with his scarlet jacket hidden by the lieutenant's long, loose garment, which also well concealed the musical instruments, they walked together through the gates.

Fifty yards farther on, Dick felt his shoulder suddenly seized, and he was thrust through a swing-door into the gas-lit glare of a public-house bar.

Chapter Twenty.

Beneath the Lady's Lattice-Pane.

Dick Smithson turned round in astonishment to gaze in the face of his companion, whose act had at once taken the attention of a couple of soldiers, out beyond their time, and of some men with whom they were drinking.

"Call for something, Smithson," whispered the lieutenant, glancing back anxiously at the door.

"But I don't want anything, sir," said Dick, angrily.

"Never mind; treat me, then."

Dick stared, wondering whether his companion was going out of his mind.

"Don't stop," whispered the lieutenant. "Order some beer."

With the reason beginning to dawn upon him now, Dick ordered and paid for two pots of ale, which he handed to the two half-tipsy soldiers, who began proposing their health just as steps and voices were heard passing.

The next minute they were outside.

"A false alarm, Smithson," said the lieutenant, with a forced laugh, as he dabbed his forehead. "I caught a glimpse of them lower down; I thought it was the major and the doctor. How absurd it all seemed. You don't think those two fellows will talk about it?"

"Well, sir, I can't help thinking they will," replied Dick.

"That will be awkward," said the lieutenant in dismay. "They ought to have been in barracks; and they may excuse themselves by saying that I was treating them at a public-house."

"Yes, sir, it will be awkward," said Dick, who felt annoyed and yet amused.

"It will look so ungentlemanly. You see, they were both men belonging to my company. Whatever shall I do?"

"Nothing, I should say, sir. I don't see what you can do."

"No," said the lieutenant, shaking his head sadly. "What a pity it is that things will go so crookedly!" And he walked on in silence down into the main street, looking sharply from side to side.

"Anyone would think that we were going to commit a burglary," muttered Dick. As they went on for some time, "Is it here, sir?" he ventured to say at last.

"Only about five hundred yards more, Smithson; but, really, that *contretemps* has so upset me that I think you had better play a solo. I shall never get through a duet."

"But that would be of no use, sir," cried Dick. "It would be only my music then. It ought to be your serenade."

"Yes, Smithson—it ought," sighed the lieutenant in a husky whisper; "but, if I broke down, it would be absurd."

"But you wouldn't break down, sir. See how correctly you played it this evening."

"Yes, I did—didn't I? You think I could do it, don't you?"

"I'm sure you could, sir, if you would only forget about being nervous."

"I must try," said the lieutenant. "We are very near now."

They were now where the lamps had grown fewer, and consequently the road between was much darker; but there was light enough for Dick to see that they were passing a series of detached houses, built upon the same plan, standing back some forty yards from the road, and approached by semicircular carriage drives from gate to gate. Trees were plentiful in the grounds, and overhung and darkened the footpath; so that, as they passed the second gateway, the lieutenant gave a violent start, for from close up to the wall there came a gruff voice—

"Night, gentlemen!"

"Eh! You quite startled me," said the lieutenant. "I didn't see you."

"No, sir. Don't want to be seen," replied the man. "Get some queer customers down here sometimes, and obliged to keep a sharp look-out."

"Yes; quite right," said the lieutenant, feebly; and he walked straight on for about a hundred yards before speaking.

"It's all over, Smithson!" he whispered at last.

"All over, sir?"

"Yes; that's the house, and there's the policeman on the watch."

"That's awkward," said Dick; "but he'll soon go, sir."

"Soon go, man! Who's to go and play a duet with a policeman keeping his eye upon you all the time? I couldn't do it, Smithson."

"Let's walk on a little farther, sir, and then turn back."

"No; we must give it up for to-night. How terribly strange things are turning up! And, besides, it's getting so late."

They walked on a quarter of a mile and then turned back, hardly a word being said, the lieutenant filling up the time by uttering the peculiar sound expressed by the word *tut* repeated rapidly.

"Shall I go on first, sir, and see if the policeman is there?" said Dick at last.

"No, no; it would look so suspicious. He might take us for bad characters. We must walk by together."

"Very well, sir," replied Dick; and they strolled slowly along the now deserted road, with the lights in the upper windows of the houses gradually dying out one by one, as if to prove that the lieutenant's words about being late were correct.

To their great satisfaction, though, the lights were still plainly to be seen in the last house but one of those standing back, and as they passed the swing gates no policeman was visible.

But they walked on back towards the town for another hundred yards, and then stopped.

"Coast quite clear, sir," said Dick.

"Think so, Smithson? Is it safe?"

"The constable has evidently gone on his round."

"But he said something about watching."

"Yes, sir; but he would not stop in one place. I'd venture, if I were you."

"Then we will, Smithson. Come along back at once, and let's get it over. The plan of attack is to go quickly through the gate, pass on to the grass, and then right up to the house—on the lawn, of course. Then one, two, three, four, and start at once."

"Yes, sir; I understand. I'll count four in a whisper, and away we go."

"There, then, not a word till I tap your arm with my flute, which you can give me as soon as we have got on to the lawn."

The entrance was reached again, but there was no policeman in the dark nook, and, raising the latch, the lieutenant swung open the gate, and they passed through, the latch falling back into its place with a faint click which sounded terribly loud, and made them pause for a moment or two.

"Come along," whispered the lieutenant; "on to the grass."

"What's your little game?"

It was a gruff whisper from out of a clump of laurustinus, and, as the stalwart figure of the policeman moved up in the darkness, the lieutenant turned to flee, but stopped short on Dick grasping his arm.

"There's nothing wrong, constable!" said Dick, quickly.

"No; and I don't mean for there to be! Just consider yourselves ketched! No gammon, or I whistles, and there'll be dozens of our chaps here in no time; and, if they comes and finds you're nasty, there won't be no mercy—and so I tell yer!"

"Don't be absurd," said Dick, thinking it better to out with the truth; "we've only come to play a tune or two in front of the house."

"Yes, yes!" said the lieutenant, feebly.

"Yes, yes!" cried the constable, mockingly. "I know—one on yer's going to play a toon on the centre-bit while t'other sings

the pop'lar and original air o' 'Gentle Jemmy in the 'ouse.' Now, then, no gammon! Come on!"

"Hadn't we better walk to the station with him, and explain to his officer?" said the lieutenant, mildly.

"No!" cried Dick, angrily; "we'll make him understand here! Don't be absurd, constable; this is a gentleman—"

"From London. I know!"

"Nonsense! he lives in Ratcham. It is only meant for a pleasant little surprise."

"To find the plate gone, eh!"

"I tell you we were going to play a tune or two!"

"Then where's your organ?"

"Absurd!"

"Fiddles, then?"

"Fiddles—nonsense! Here are our instruments."

Dick unbuttoned the loose overcoat and brought out the two flutes.

As Dick unfastened the coat there was a faint, gleam of light from the constable's belt, which shone on Dick's chest.

"From the barracks, eh?" said the constable, surlily. "Humph! Well, I'm sure I don't know what to say. You may be London burglars, and putting a clever flam on me."

"Do people go burgling with flutes?" said Dick, angrily. "Now, look here, go back to the gate, and mind we are not interrupted! This gentleman is going to slip two half-crowns in your hand."

"Well, if it's all right, and only a bit of music, I don't want to be disagreeable, gentlemen. Sarah-naying, don't you call it? Only look out: I have heered tell o' blunderbusses and revolvers about here! Thankye, sir; but, of course, that wasn't ness'ry. I've got to go 'bout half-mile! down the road, so you'd better get it over before I come back."

The man went off, and the lieutenant stood panting.

"I'd rather have faced the enemy's shot, Smithson!" he whispered.

"But it's all right now, sir," said Dick. "Catch hold of your flute. I'd not interfere with the tuning-slide: it's quite correct."

"It's impossible, Smithson; my hands are trembling terribly."

"You'll forget it as soon as we begin, sir. Come along!"

Dick led the way in and out among the clumps of shrubs that dotted the soft lawn till the house was reached, and the lieutenant yielded to the stronger will, following with his flute in his hand.

"Which is her window, sir?" whispered Dick.

"That one," replied the lieutenant, feebly, as they stood there in the darkness, with the stars glimmering overhead and the sweet fragrance of the dewy flowers rising all around.

"Then one—two—three—*four*" whispered Dick. "Off!"

"He regularly makes me," muttered the lieutenant, raising the flute to his lips, and the sweet, soft sounds floated out upon the night breeze, the pupil playing far better than Dick had anticipated, and keeping well up through the first verse, evidently encouraged by the successful issue of his lessons, and also by the fact that there came a sharp snap overhead, followed by the peculiar squeaking, grating sound of a window-sash being raised, while, dimly seen above, there was a figure in white.

That second verse rang out with its message of flowers committed to the flowing river more and more sweetly than before, though it was not really the lieutenant's fault, for Dick kept on throwing out a few clear notes—additional to his part—when some of his companion's threatened to die away, and these grace notes came in with such delicious, florid eccentricity that a hearer would have taken them for intentional variations cleverly composed by a good musician.

On the whole, then, the performance was as creditable as it was charming; and the second verse ended.

"A bar's rest, and then once more," whispered Dick. "One—two—three—four."

Pat! scatter, and a feeble groan!

Then a voice from the open window—a peculiarly clarionetty harsh voice, such as could only come from a very elderly lady's throat—

"Thank you! Very nicely played. Good-night."

The window squeaked, was then closed loudly, and whispering "Come along!" the lieutenant was in full retreat towards the gate, while Dick was choking in his endeavour to smother his laughter.

"Coppers!" groaned the lieutenant; "that must have been quite a shilling's worth of halfpence wrapped up in paper. They hit me on the top of the head."

"And burst and scattered over the grass," whispered Dick, trying to be serious.

"Yes, Smithson; and if I had had no cap the consequences might have been serious."

"Were you hurt, sir?"

"More mentally than bodily, Smithson," sighed the lieutenant.

"But how could the lady make such a mistake as to think we—you were a travelling musician?"

"The lady?" cried the lieutenant angrily. "How can you be so absurd, Smithson! it was her prim old aunt!"

There was no more said on the way back to the barracks, much to Dick's satisfaction, for he felt that if the lieutenant spoke he would be compelled to burst out with a roar of laughter in his face.

Chapter Twenty One.

Dick Smithson's Anti-Fat.

Busy days in barracks, youth, and the high spirits consequent upon living an active, healthy life, had their effect on Dick. The past naturally grew farther off, and, unnaturally, seemed farther still; so that, before six months had passed, the young bandsman had thoroughly settled down to his music and military life, and began to find it enjoyable, in spite of the petty annoyances such as fall to the lot of all.

For there was always something in the way. The band had its regular military duties, and played at the mess, where, to Wilkins' great disgust, Dick's flute and piccolo solos grew in favour with the officers, and often had to be repeated.

Then there were fêtes in the neighbourhood, balls given, and twice over the band was required at a public dinner.

The lessons given to Lieutenant Lacey were continued, and that officer certainly improved; but he did not evince the slightest desire to repeat the serenade, not even alluding to it when Dick visited his rooms.

There were times, of course, when a fit of low spirits would set Dick dreaming a little about what might have been, but he soon dismissed thoughts of the past; and in all the months since he had left Mr Draycott's no single scrap of news reached his ears, neither was it sought.

"I have no past," he would say to himself, as he forced himself energetically into every duty and every sport encouraged by the colonel.

Before long it was a settled thing that he must be one of the best eleven when cricket was in the way, and when the season came round he played as good a part at football.

The officers always had a friendly nod for him, and on one occasion the colonel spoke to him after a solo, praising him highly.

"But, do you know, Smithson," he said, "I am half-sorry that you are not in the ranks. Music is a delightful thing; but for a young man, like you, a bandsman in a line regiment is only a bandsman, after all. I think you might do better, though I should be sorry for you to leave the band. Think it over, my lad; I should like to see you get on."

Dick did think it over, for he was aware, by his clothes, that he had altered greatly since that afternoon when the sergeant looked at him and laughed.

"I can't be too short and slight now."

But he hesitated. There had never been any need for him to be disenchanted with regard to imaginative pictures of a soldier's life; but, all the same, he could not help, after his months of experience, shrinking from taking to a life in the ranks, with its many monotonous drills.

Still, he thought it over, and wondered how long it would be before he rose to corporal, and was then promoted to sergeant and colour-sergeant.

Lastly, was there the slightest possibility for a young man like himself to gain a commission? He always came to the same conclusion. He might: but he was far more likely to fail; and he did not know that he wished to be an officer now. In fact, he shuddered at the thoughts which followed.

Meanwhile the time went on, with the feeling always upon him that the colonel might ask him whether he had come to any decision. But that officer never spoke; for the simple reason that the words, uttered after dinner, when he was in a good humour, were entirely forgotten, and as if they had never been uttered.

One day upon parade, and away upon the Common, when the band was drawn up on one side after playing, during a march past, there was a little scene with one of Dick's friends—the man whose acquaintance he had first made and whose good feeling he still retained.

"Here, sergeant," shouted the colonel; and Brumpton doubled up to him, halted, and stood fast, conscious that officers and men were on the grin. "Look here, Brumpton, this really will not do. Confound you, sir! you're making the regiment a laughing-stock."

"Very sorry, sir—try to do my duty."

"Yes, yes," cried the colonel. "You are a capital sergeant; but look at you this morning!"

Brumpton rolled his eyes about, but stood still.

"I would not do that, man; you can't see behind you. Are you aware that the back seams of your jacket are opening out?"

"No, sir, but they will do it."

"Then why the dickens don't you train and get rid of some of that superfluous fat? There, you can't stop on parade. Go and get your jacket mended."

Poor Brumpton's face changed as he turned to go, but before he had gone far the colonel cried:

"Stop! There, go on with your duty, sir.—Poor fellow," he muttered, "I can't be hard upon him. But he is so disgustingly fat; eh, Lacey?"

"Yes, he is fat," said the lieutenant, thoughtfully. "Poor beggar! it would be rough upon him on service if we had to run. I mean retreat, sir!"

"The 205th will never be in such a position, sir," said the colonel stiffly. "Run, indeed! The 205th run!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the lieutenant, whose face was now almost as red as his uniform.

"Granted, Mr Lacey; but, for goodness' sake, don't you ever let me hear you say a word again about running."

"Not forward, sir?"

"Oh, yes; that, of course."

The long morning's evolutions were gone through, the band went to the front, and the regiment was marched back to barracks; and that same afternoon, as Dick sat alone in the reading-room, copying a band-part for Wilkins, there was a panting noise close behind him, and Brumpton's thick, rich voice exclaimed:

"Oh, there you are! I've been looking for you everywhere. How are you, Smithson?"

"Quite well," said Dick, smiling in the non-commissioned officer's face.

"Don't—don't do that," said Brumpton, sharply.

"Don't do what, Mr Brumpton?"

"Laugh at a man."

"You don't think I was laughing at you?" said Dick, gravely.

"No, no—of course not. You wouldn't, my lad. But, my word! how you are growing, Smithson! It's the drilling. You have altered since you came."

"Have I?"

"Wonderfully, my lad—wonderfully! Men showed up well this morning," he continued, seating himself.

"Capitally," said Dick.

"Couldn't hear what the colonel said, could you?"

"Every word."

"But you couldn't see, could you?" said the sergeant, appealingly.

"Oh, yes; two great slits, with the stuffing coming out."

Brumpton groaned.

"I say, why don't you make the tailor take all the padding away?" cried Dick.

"I did beg and pray of him to, but he wouldn't. He said it would spoil my figure, and I should look fuller and fatter. Oh, dear! I never thought, after working as I have in the regiment, that I should live to be laughed at like this!"

"Oh, don't mind that. I couldn't help laughing, too, Mr Brumpton. It did look rather comic."

"To you, my lad—to you; but it's death to me! I shall be turned out of the regiment on a pension. Me going out on a pension at my time of life! But it must come."

"Don't let it," said Dick. "You're a young man yet."

"Yes; six-and-thirty, Smithson—that's all."

"Well, will you let me speak plainly, Mr Brumpton?"

"Of course, I will, my dear boy; I always liked you from the day when you came up to me and wanted the shilling. I said to myself then, 'This chap's a gentleman—'"

"Oh, nonsense—nonsense," cried Dick.

"Ah! you needn't tell me. I know. But I'm not going to pump you. If you want to keep it dark why you've run away from home, you've a right to. What were you going to say, Smithson?"

Dick was growing nervous and excited, and jumped at the change in the conversation.

"I was going to say that, as it is such a pity for you to grow so stout, why don't you eat less?"

"Eat! My dear boy, I almost starve myself."

"Drink less, then. If I were you, I wouldn't take so much beer."

"But I don't, Smithson; I don't—I give it up ever so long ago—only ginger, and that can't make me fat. It don't make no difference whether I eat and drink hearty or starve myself: it all goes to fat. I really believe sometimes that the very wind agrees with me and runs to it."

"Then do as the colonel said—train, run, use the clubs."

"I have," cried Brumpton, "for months; but I only get worse."

"Don't sleep quite so much, then."

"Oh, dear!" groaned the sergeant; "I've cut myself down to five hours, and surely that oughtn't to be too much. It's no good, Smithson—not a bit! If I was to be shut up in a lump of coal, like a toad, I should go on getting fat till the coal split up the back, like one of my jackets."

"Well, it does seem hard," said Dick.

"No, sir; soft—horridly soft," said the sergeant, and he rose with a sigh. "I've felt sometimes that if I get my discharge I shall make an end of myself."

"Nonsense."

"Oh, I shall. I've often thought of drowning myself, after being laughed at, but I couldn't do that."

"I should think not."

"Fat would be against me there, Smithson; I should only float."

The idea of the plump sergeant bobbing about, half out of the water, like a cork-float, excited Dick's laughing muscles; but he saw how genuine was the distress of the poor fellow standing before him, and he forbore, knowing as he did that a good warm heart beat beneath that coating of fat and that Brumpton was a clever officer and devoted to his work.

"I wish I could help you, sergeant," said Dick, at last.

"So do I, my lad; but you can't."

"Have you tried the doctor?"

"Yes—yes," said Brumpton, dolefully.

"What did he advise?"

"Nothing! Laughed at me."

Dick sat, tapping the table with his penholder.

"I know how it will be," continued the sergeant. "I shall be pitched out of the regiment, and then I shall begin to get thin from misery and despair."

"Going?" said Dick.

"Yes; I'll just walk round to the canteen and get in the scales again. I try 'em every day, hoping to find 'em moving the wrong way, but I never can. I was seventeen stone thirteen yesterday; next week I shall be eighteen stone, and they can't keep a man like that in the army."

"Stop! Look here!" cried Dick, so earnestly that the sergeant plumped down again into his seat, gazing wildly into the young man's face, ready to grasp at any straw to save himself from being drowned in his misery.

"Yes, yes," he panted; and he began to wipe his big, smooth face. "Got an idea?"

"I think I could cure you, Mr Brumpton."

"Could you? How? I'll take anything. I don't mind how nasty."

"I've got an idea that I think will work, and, if it doesn't take down your fat, it would keep you from having to leave the regiment."

The sergeant made a grab at Dick's hand.

"What is it? What is it?" he panted.

"Learn the bombardon!"

The sergeant loosened his grasp, and sank back again.

"You're laughing at me," he said, reproachfully; "and it comes hard from you, Dick Smithson."

"I'm not laughing at you, sergeant," cried Dick, earnestly. "Look here! it's a thing I have often noticed; but I never thought of applying it to you. Who are the two thinnest men in the band?"

"Those two young chaps who play the trombones."

"Exactly, and nearly all the fellows are thin. You learn to play the bombardon, and I'll be bound to say that it will pull you down."

"Think so?" said the sergeant, with a sigh.

"I feel sure!"

"But how can I?"

"Oh, you could manage that. Tell Mr Wilkins you've taken a fancy to learn the instrument. I'll help you."

The sergeant looked doubtful.

"Then, if it doesn't get your fat down, you could come in the band. You'd look splendid, marching along with that great brass instrument!"

"Not chaffing me, are you?" said the sergeant, suspiciously.

"Chaffing? No, man. There, I'll speak out frankly to show you how sincere I am. It does look absurd to see you puffing and

panting along at the double with your company. Don't be offended."

"No, my lad—no. It does look very stupid. Nobody knows it better than I do."

"But, marching with the band, your size would not be noticed, especially as you would be carrying that great brass bass instrument with its huge bell-mouth."

"Well, do you know, I'm beginning to like that idea, Smithson. But I'm not very clever over music. Big drum seems more in my way."

"Oh, no. You could soon get on with a bass instrument. Have you ever learnt anything?"

"Tin whistle, when I was a boy."

"Oh, that would not help you much. You say you'll try, and I'll help you."

"Try," cried the sergeant. "I'd try bugling;" and he soon after left the room with the understanding that, Mr Wilkins being willing, he was to begin his practice the very next day.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Dick Smithson sees a Ghost.

A bright, brisk, early spring morning, with bugles sounding, the tramp of feet, an occasional hoarse shout, and, out in the sunshine, gleams of light flashing in all directions from well-burnished brass ornament or rifle-stock; while the generally dismal-looking barrack yard was gay as a garden-bed newly planted with scarlet geraniums in full bloom.

But there was this difference: the floral effects in front of the dingy buildings surrounding the yard were all in motion, for the men were collecting fast, and in obedience to the sharp "Fall in!" roughly formed line after line, each man making for his company.

The bandsmen, too, were collecting, like the men of the regiment, in full review order; for that day there was to be a

march out to meet the 310th, now on its way to take up quarters in the High Barracks, and the band of the 205th were to play them in through the town to their new quarters.

Quite an unnecessary proceeding, but one of those forms which, provided the weather is good, proves satisfactory to the British soldier; for it means show, excitement, a pleasant tramp, and something to relieve the deadly monotony of barrack-life, with its eternal drill and routine.

No morning could have been more genial for the purpose, and the prospect of a few miles' march, with the people of town and village *en fête*, was a welcome one to all but the men in the infirmary, who were looking gloomily from the windows at their comrades, all spick and span, eager for the change.

Then, with the sun flashing from the brass instruments, the band formed up, all the officers began to drop down from their quarters, best uniforms being the order of the day, as there were no signs of rain; and, at last, after a few sharp orders from the sergeants, the companies were formed, the preliminary examinations made, and the usual adjurations delivered respecting buttons, belts, and suspicious spots. But there was not much cause for complaint, and the men were well in place when the trampling of horses was heard. The men stood to their arms, and the mounted colonel and major came slowly up to the front; while a group of officers passed to and fro along the line of well-drilled young fellows, who made up one of the smartest corps in the service.

A few movements, performed with wonderful accuracy, giving the regiment the aspect of some peculiar piece of mechanism, and then the order was given, "Band to the front!" A brief pause, a sharp command or two, and then *boom—boom—boom—boom*, so many beats of the big drum, a crash from the brass instruments, which came echoing strangely back from the barrack walls, and away they went toward the gates, where half the boys and idlers of the neighbourhood were waiting, ready to give a cheer as the drum-and-fife band passed out first in solemn silence, followed by little Wilkins, looking very important at the head of the brass instruments, but in dangerous proximity to the trombone-players, cutting and slashing with their long tubes, behind him.

Some people are hard to impress, but they are few who do not feel a thrill of excitement on the passing-by of a well-drilled regiment whose band is playing some lively march, to which, and the heavy beat of the drum, the tramp, tramp of six or

eight hundred men is heard, like the pulsation of Old England's warlike heart. The thrill is felt by the bystanders and the men themselves; and the sight of the eager, interested faces the soldiers pass has given renewed spirit to many a man, hot, weary, and faint from some long march, and seemed to tighten muscle and nerve for the work yet to come.

That special morning Dick Smithson felt that, after all, his was a very bright and happy life. The past was dead; he had friends about him, and there was a delirious feeling of satisfaction to be there, at the head of the long line of men, whose glittering bayonets flashed and undulated in the sun as they passed down the main street, at the end of which, where the people formed a crowd, hurrying along on either side, the brass band ended its strains, and after a preliminary flourish on the kettle-drums these and the fifes rattled and shrilled in their well-marked music.

Turn and turn, with an occasional change, when the kettle-drums had it all to themselves—*trr—trr—trr—trr*—a light, sharp tap, to mark the step as the towns were left behind, and the course led between the Kentish hedgerows and the bare fields, which seemed to be growing crops of poles, for the young hops themselves were only just showing their bronze-hued points above the ground.

Then, on and on, in open order, till, far away on the slope of a hill, where the white chalky road could be traced for miles, a cloud of dust could be seen. Soon after there was a flicker, as if the cloud were not dust, but smoke, and the flickering light was that of the fire within. Then there was another flicker, and more and more, till it was plain enough that the sun was being reflected from burnished brass or steel, and the sinuous cloud was hovering over the regiment they had come to meet.

Half an hour later the two regiments had met, there had been a halt called, and at its end the march back to town was commenced, the men going over the hard road with a light, springy step.

It was all very simple and unadventurous, but everyone seemed to enjoy it—the men whose march had only been from Ratcham and those whose dusty clothes told of the many long miles they had tramped since early morn.

The crowd was greater than ever when the town was reached again, the 205th's band leading them and making the streets echo to the strains of "The British Grenadiers." There were loud

bursts of cheering, too, now, and the traffic was stopped as the band was halted near the gates of the High Barracks to play the 310th in.

As everyone does not know, perhaps, so as to keep up a sustained military march, the brass band is divided into two parts, one of which will play through certain portions of the melody, which is then taken up by the second part, while the first regains breath, ready to take its turn again and to join in unison with the other in some *forte* passage.

Close up to the High Barrack gates, then, the bandsmen stood upon the pavement, while the companies of the 310th marched up the road. Dick Smithson was resting with the men of his side, while the others were concluding their part. The next minute Dick was in the act of raising his piccolo to his lips to shower out a burst of its bright bird-like music, while *tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp*, the men marched by, when his nerves suddenly seemed to be paralysed, his muscles refused to act, and he stood holding the tiny bright-keyed flute level with his chin, staring hard at a young officer, weary, covered with chalky dust, and with a set supercilious smile upon his lips, as he turned his eyes left to stare contemptuously at the young bandsman he passed.

It was almost momentary, just taking as long as a man walking at a steady pace would occupy. Then he was by, leaving Dick staring after him as if in a cataleptic fit, his face full of terror and despair.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Haunted.

For nearly a minute Dick did not stir, but stood staring, with eyes wide open, lips apart, and the piccolo held still on a level with his chin.

Then, as the figure of the officer was hidden by the marching men, the young musician uttered a low, hoarse sound—the pent-up breath escaping from his lungs. The while the buildings opposite, the crowd of people in doorways and at windows, even the marching men steadily tramping by, seemed to undulate, rise, and then slowly glide round and round, till he

gave a violent start; for a hand had grasped his arm, and he turned to gaze at the clarionet-player who was supporting him.

"What is it? A bit faint?"

"I—I don't know," faltered Dick.

"I do. That's it. You've been blowing a bit too hard. Don't play any more. We've just done."

A minute or two gave the lad time to try and recover himself.

"Yes, that's it," said the clarionet-player; "you got excited, and played too hard. I remember being once like that; I shivered just as you are shivering now. Doctor said it was only nerves."

"Only nerves!" said Dick, in a low tone, involuntarily repeating the man's words.

"Yes, that's it. Keep cool, and you'll soon come right. Feel faint now?"

"No, the giddiness has gone off."

"That's right."

The bandsman ceased speaking, for he had to take his part again, as the rear of the new regiment marched past with the mounted officers. Then followed an ambulance waggon, the water-tub, two or three baggage waggons, and half a dozen men who had fallen out on the march, all of whom Dick saw as if it were part of a dream, which lasted, in a confused way, as he and his companion joined their own regiment, took their place at the head, and returned to their own quarters.

"Getting all right, again?" said the clarionet-player, as they stood together in the barrack yard waiting to be dismissed.

"What is it? What's the matter?" asked Wilkins, sourly.

"Smithson sick, sir," was the reply.

The bandmaster looked at his principal flute curiously, but said nothing.

The next minute they were dismissed, and Dick longed in vain for a place where he could be alone, the only approach to it being the open window, where, after the customary change of

uniform and wash and clean, he sat gazing out at the sky, but seeing no bright silvery clouds—nothing but the face of that young officer and the old ruins down by the flooded river; for it seemed to Dick Smithson that—in spite of what had been written about midnight and the witching hour—he had seen a ghost, and in the broad daylight, too.

He tried to cast the idea from him again and again, but that face would return, wonderful in its resemblance, and at last a painful, feverish fit came on; for the countenance he had that day gazed upon, and which had impressed him so painfully, brought up all the old life which he had tried so hard and successfully to forget.

"It's like a punishment to me, for trying to forget that which I ought always to bear in mind," he said at last, with a sigh. "How horrible! and how strange that two people could be so much alike!"

Dick played with the band in the mess-room that evening, and one or two of his comrades told him he looked ill; but he laughed it off, and tried to make them believe that the little fit of weariness was a mere nothing. But his face told a different tale, and that night, when he went to his bed, sleep refused to come; and to the accompaniment of his comrades' heavy breathing—that being the most charitable term that can be applied to it—he once more went over his old life at Mr Draycott's, from his first entering the great coach's establishment up to the morning he had left.

At last sleep came—a miserable, feverish slumber, from which he was aroused by the *reveille*.

"There," he said to himself. "I shall be all right now," as he took his dripping head out of the bowl of cold water, and felt refreshed by the scrub he gave himself; but somehow he did not feel right. His head burned, and he was glad to get out in the open air, in the hope that a little exercise would clear his brain and drive away the cobweb-like fancies which seemed to interfere with its working.

Vain hope! The thoughts only came the faster, and at last he began to ask himself whether he was going to be ill.

"Mark's dead!" he found himself saying mentally; "and there are no such things as ghosts—education killed the last of them years ago. But it does seem horrible to come suddenly face to face with a fellow so like poor Mark that I should have felt ready

to declare it was he. Nature does make people different; and yet that officer is as like him as can be. Of course, he would have grown set and more manly. And—oh! but it's impossible! He's dead! he's dead!"

He had gone back into the band-room, where, as of old, some twenty men were blowing hard, each working up the parts of new pieces, and utterly regardless, as well as unconscious, of his neighbour—use having given the bandsmen the ability to practice away deaf to the noise produced by others. Here he sat down in his own corner, and began to look over his music, expecting that before long Wilkins would be there to try over a few pieces in proper harmony instead of discord. But the crotchets and quavers became people, and the staves the roads along which they passed; and, the more he tried, the more excited he grew.

For a few minutes he enjoyed a rest, for his eyes suddenly rested upon Brumpton, who, looking wonderfully fat, shiny, and happy, sat back, with his jacket unbuttoned, pumping away at the huge brass instrument, whose coils he nursed at his breast while he boomed and burred and brought forth bass notes of the deepest and richest quality.

Then Brumpton's smooth, round face grew dim, and in its place there was the haughty, self-satisfied young officer, proud of his regimentals and scornfully gazing at the young bandsman as he passed.

Dick could bear it no longer; he felt that he must get back into the open air, and to some place where he could be in peace while he made up his mind what to do.

The next minute his mind did not want making up. He had come to a determination; for, feeling that he would never be able to rest until he had got rid of the idea of the officer he had met being his cousin Mark, he set off with the intention of questioning some of the men of the incoming regiment about their officers.

He started, and had just got outside the door of the band-room, when he ran against Wilkins, who turned upon him sharply—

"Now, sir! don't run away; I am going to try over that grand march."

"Back directly, sir!" cried Dick; and, to the bandmaster's indignation, he was off as hard as he could go towards the barrack gates.

Chapter Twenty Four.

The Strange Complication.

"I shall be in trouble again," thought Dick; "but I can't help it! I feel as if that old bit of excitement was coming over me."

The next minute he was out in the street, and making his way toward the High Barracks, trying to calm down his excitement and come to some decision as to how he would find out. It seemed simple enough, for what would Mark be? A lieutenant; and any corporal or sergeant would tell him whether there was a Lieutenant Frayne in the regiment.

But long before Dick reached the barracks he had another shock; for, all at once, in turning a corner, he saw a well-built private sauntering along on the other side whose face was unmistakable, though how he had become a soldier was more than Dick could grasp.

The man did not see him, and Dick passed on for a few yards, feeling his forehead, then his pulse, to find the latter a little accelerated, the former perfectly cool.

"I'm not going mad!" he muttered, excitedly. "I may be dreaming, but—"

He said no more, but turned sharply and followed the private, who was evidently taking his first walk through the town, and had become a little interested in the place.

Dick did not hesitate, but followed the private till he was close behind him, and then uttered one word sharply, which brought him round on the instant, to stare hard at the speaker, but without any change of countenance.

"Yes; what is it? I've got my pass."

Dick could not speak again for the peculiar feeling of emotion which troubled him, and the man began to frown.

"Was it me you meant when you called 'Jerry'?" he said.

"Yes; you are Jerry Brigley."

"I'm Jeremiah Brigley," was the snappish reply, "and I tell you I've got my pass. There you are."

But Dick did not even glance at it, for this was a new shock. Some day he meant to go back and claim his position—some day—but here was a man with whom he had been on most intimate terms staring at him blankly without a sign of recognition!

"Mornin'!" said Jerry, shortly; and he faced round and walked on. But Dick was after him directly, recovering somewhat from the shock he had sustained, and ready to treat the position with something like forced mirth in his delight at meeting one old link with the past.

"Jerry!" he cried, and the man faced round sharply.

"Well, what do you want with him?"

"Don't you know me, Jerry?" cried Dick.

"No, and don't want to; and, if this is a try-on to get me to stand beer, it's a dead failure!"

"Not quite!" said Dick, smiling, though his heart ached.

"Look here, do you want a tanner?" cried Jerry, snappishly.

"Well, I am short of money," said Dick, as a sudden thought came to mind; "but not a tanner. Pay me the sovereign you borrowed of me!"

"What?"

"I did not mean ever to ask you for it, but it would be useful now."

"Well, I'm blest!" cried Jerry. "Talk about cheek! When did I borrow a sovereign of you, my whippersnapper?"

"Two years ago, when you wanted to bet on some horse for the Derby."

Jerry's jaw dropped.

"Who—who—who—who—says?" he stuttered. "How did—? When did—? Here—who are you?—How did—? I say: who are you?"

"Dick Smithson, 205th Band," replied the young man, unable to keep from enjoying the state of puzzlement in which his ex-servant was plunged.

"But I don't know no Dick Smithson; and how you—you—you! Oh, lor'!"

Jerry had suddenly turned ghastly, reeled, and caught at the lamp-post close at hand.

"Hush! Quiet!" cried Dick, in an excited whisper. "Don't make a scene!"

"S'Richard!" gasped Jerry.

"Silence, man! Here, come down the next street," whispered Dick, thrusting his arm beneath the other's to lead him into a less crowded thoroughfare; but Jerry started from him violently.

"Don't—don't touch me!" he gasped.

"Quiet, man!" said Dick, gripping him tightly. "That doesn't feel like a ghost?"

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Jerry, with the great drops of cold perspiration crowding upon his brow. "But—but I see you drownd yourself before my very eyes!"

"No, you did not, or I shouldn't be standing here now!"

"But—but—oh, lor'!" groaned Jerry, with his voice growing faint and piteous, "is—is it really you S'Rich—?"

"Silence! I'm Dick Smithson, now!" cried the young man fiercely.

"But you was S'Richard," groaned Jerry, "before you come to life again!"

"What nonsense are you talking now?"

"Only the truth, sir. Why—why—oh, dear! can we get a drop o' brandy?"

"Come in here," said Dick, seeing how bad the man looked, and he led him into a tavern which, oddly enough, it being a garrison town, stood near.

The next minute they were seated alone in the parlour, and Jerry guardedly stretched out his hand to touch Dick's knee.

"Well!" said the young man, "does it feel real?"

"Yes; but I see you drownd yourself before my very eyes, S'Rich—"

"Silence, man!"

"But I did," said Jerry, plaintively; "and we sat upon you at the inquest."

"What!"

"Didn't I see you, my poor, dear lad, all stripped and torn by beating about in the river-bed with stones and old trees; and didn't I go and drop a tear or two on your coffin?"

"Jerry!"

"I did the day as you was buried, though things was that bad I had to sell my watch to pay my fare."

"Here, quick! Tell me," cried Dick, whose turn it was to be staggered now, "you—you—they—they did all this?"

"To be sure they did; and you're as dead as a door-nail, sir. I see it all myself. Oh, my lad! how could you—how could you go and drownd yourself like that?"

"I—go to drown myself! Nonsense!" cried Dick. Then, as the truth flashed upon him: "Why, Jerry, it was that poor boy with the sheep—the boy I tried to save."

"No; it was you, sir—I followed you, and got there just too late."

"You did!"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"But you don't understand, Jerry."

"No. I don't; and that's the worst of it, sir," cried Jerry, piteously. "You was buried, for I followed yer; so how can you be here now a-talking to me?"

"But don't you see?"

"Yes, I do now. You got to know all about it, and you're an impostor; that's what you are!"

"Oh, Jerry, you always were a fool!" cried Dick, angrily. "Don't you see that it was the poor fellow they found—the drowning boy I tried to save?"

"Then you didn't try to drown yourself, sir?"

"Drown myself! Was I likely to do such a thing? Wasn't it enough that I ran away, like the cowardly fool I was?"

"Then you ain't never been dead at all, then, sir?"

"Absurd!"

"And they buried the wrong man?"

"Good Heavens! what a position, Jerry! Yes," cried Dick, startled now by the complications rising before his eyes.

"And you really are alive and hearty, and—how you've growed, and—and—why, of course, it is! Pay you back the money—S'Richard, why I'd—oh, my lad, my lad—I—I—I—oh, what a fool I am!"

Fool or no, Jerry Brigley broke down, and sat holding on by his companion's hands sobbing for some moments before he uttered a loud gulp, and then seemed relieved.

Meanwhile Dick sat staring straight before him, almost unconscious of poor Jerry's acts. The revelation he had heard was paralysing. It was horrible to think of; and, moment by moment, he began to realise how difficult it would be to convince people of his identity when he went back to claim his own.

He had just come to the conclusion that there must be an end to his masquerading now, when Jerry recovered himself sufficiently to demand a full account of how he had escaped from the flood.

This had to be given, and then Dick cried bitterly—

"Then my cousin did not die, after all?"

"Him? Die? Not, he, sir. He wouldn't, die a bit. He allus was a base deceiver of a fellow—beggin' your pardon, sir."

"And I frightened myself into that folly for nothing!"

"Well, he was bad, sir, certainly; and the doctors thought so, too. But he allus falls on his feet, sir. I don't. Nice mess I made of it, sir!"

"Ah! How came you to enlist, Jerry?" said Dick, forcing himself to take some interest in his old servant.

"How came I to 'list, sir? Why, all along o' him. I got in such a mess I had to leave Mr Draycott's."

"How, Jerry? Why?"

"Got wild, sir. I'd been idgit enough to think as I could make a lot o' money with my savings by putting 'em on hosses, and so soon as I did, sir, they wouldn't win a bit; and, from going to the hosses, I went next to the dogs; and then I was in such a state that there was no chance for me at all; and I wrote to him at last, for I see his name in the paper as being gazetted to the 310th. And what d'yer think he said?"

"I don't know, Jerry," said Dick, dreamily, for he was again thinking of his own troubles.

"He said I'd better enlist, and then he could have me as his servant again."

"Yes, exactly."

"Well, sir, it's 'bout the last thing I should ever ha' thought o' doing, but it seemed all right. Officer's servant wouldn't be bad, and there'd sure to be some perks."

"Some what?"

"Perks, sir—perkisites: old boots and shoes and things. So I 'listed six months ago, and here have I, Jeremiah Brigley, been barked at and drilled till I could stand on my head stiff and go through it all."

"Yes, you would have to be drilled," said Dick, thoughtfully; "and how do you get on as his servant?"

"Get on, sir? As his servant, sir? Why, he on'y laughed at me, and told me he'd got somebody else; and when I turned rusty, and told him he was no gent, he reported me and had me punished. But I wasn't done, then; for, as soon as I was out, I waits my chance, and then I says to him, 'You look out,' I says, 'and mind I don't make it warm for you.'"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, go and tell his colonel, sir, all about his borrowing of old Simpson, the tailor, and throwing the credit about that there cheque on to you. For it was a reg'lar swindle, sir; you didn't get none of that money, as I know. Ah, you should have seen how small he was then! Why, he was quite humble to me, and said it was all a mistake, and, as soon as he could, he'd get me for his servant. But he won't, and a good job for him and me, too, S'Richard, sir."

"Silence, man!"

"I beg pardon, sir. O' course, that's wrong now; but I tell you this, sir: he's made me that wild again with myself, and now about you, sir, that, if I had to cut his hair or strop a razor to shave him, I should chuck the tools out o' window. I daren't go nigh him with such a weppun in my hand."

"Rubbish, Jerry! You're absurd!" cried Dick, shaking off the thoughts which troubled him as he determined to go to the colonel or Mr Lacey and explain all.

"No, sir, it ain't absurd. Flesh and blood 'll stand a deal, but there comes a time when it won't stand no more. Sir Mark Frayne's one o' they—Here! hold up, sir; it's your turn now."

For Dick had started to his feet.

"What?" he cried, huskily. "Say that again."

"What—about Sir Mark, sir?"

"Sir Mark?"

"Oh, yes, sir; you was dead and buried, his father died, and he became Sir Mark. Yes, sir, he's a barrownet now, and got all your tin; and, my word, he does make it fly!"

Chapter Twenty Five.

Jerry to the Front.

Dick Smithson found himself face to face with a problem that grew harder to solve the more he tried, and, as he lay awake at night, the words of the old, old ballad used to come to him:—

“And for as you have made your bed, so on it you must lie.”

A barrack bed, too—a very hard, thin, single Glo’ster-cheese sort of bed! And yet it seemed at the first sight so easy to jump out of it, go and see the colonel—no; he could talk to Lieutenant Lacey, who was always so friendly, and that gentleman would tell the colonel.

Oh, it would be simple enough! So long as it meant his voluntary exile, it was not of so much consequence; and he had always kept in reserve the time when he could go back to his old position in society. But now he found that when he leaped down it was from a high perpendicular rock, and the base of that rock stood in. Around, too, it was smooth; and, now jumping back was out of the question, climbing appeared impossible.

What was to be done? He could not sit still and let Mark hold his title and position without a struggle; but how to begin?

Naturally enough, the old state of calm passed away, and Dick’s brain was in a state of effervescence as he waited three days for an opportunity to meet and consult with Jerry Brigley. For this had been planned at parting, after Jerry had sworn to be silent until some plan of action had been decided upon.

At last Jerry and he met again, and this time went off for a walk towards the country, accidentally taking the road which Dick had followed when he first entered the town.

For some time the great subject they had met to discuss was avoided, and they talked about the country round, with its hills and hop-gardens, till Jerry drifted from a remark on the beauty of a sheep-cropped, velvet-green field, with its lawn-like grass, into a lesson on one of the follies of the day.

"Yes, sir," he said; "feel how soft it is under your feet! Turf's a lovely thing when it's lawns; but when it's horse-racing, and gets hold on yer tight, it's a sort o' Bedlam-Hanwelly business. Don't you never bet, sir. If I hadn't never betted, I should ha' been a rich man now, with two hundred pound in the savings bank, instead of being a private soldier—me, too, as knows more about valetting a gent than half the chaps as goes into service."

"Ah, well, Jerry, don't fret about it; things may get better."

"Ay, sir, they may; but then, you see, they might get wuss."

"Or half-way between. Let's sit down under this tree; I want to talk."

"Not a bad place, sir—fine view o' the Kentish hills. What money a man might make out of chalk, if he had it in some place ready to sell, and people would buy it! Mind my lighting a pipe, sir?"

"Mind? No; I've got pretty well hardened to people smoking about me now. Sorry I can't offer you a cigar, Jerry."

"Pipe's good enough for such as me, sir. There," continued the man, as he filled his briar-root, "aren't I keeping my tongue well in hand? Haven't called you S'Richard once."

"And you must not, whatever you do."

"Well, sir," said Jerry, lighting up, and half-shutting his eyes as he leaned back meditatively, "sometimes I don't see why not; sometimes it's all t'other. One day I says to myself, 'What's he got to mind? He's livin', and it's all nonsense about his being dead and buried; and, as to that business over the bill and the signature, why, he could fight that down like a gentleman.'"

"Yes, Jerry," said Dick, dismally; "but I ran away like a coward, and that was like a tacit confession of guilt."

"Like a what confession o' guilt?"

"Silent."

"No, sir: you said something else."

"Tacit, man—tacit."

"Oh, was it, sir. Well, if you say it was tacit, I 'spose it was. Never heered o' that sort o' confession before; it was always open confession. But, as I was a-saying, one day I thinks as I just said; next day it's all the other way. I don't want to put you out o' heart, sir; but, as you very well know, being quite a scholar, and having read o' these things lots o' times, there's an old saying about possession being nine points of the law. He's got possession tight, and, if you go and tell him he must give it up now, he'll say—"

"Well, what, Jerry?"

"Don't like to tell you, sir, for fear of giving offence."

"Speak out, man; speak out, and don't say 'sir' to me again while we are equals here in the army."

"Ekals, sir? Bein' both in the ranks don't make us ekal."

"But it must not be known at present, and if you keep calling me 'sir' you may ruin my prospects."

"All right, then; I won't say it—I'll think it, and that'll make it easier, because I can think the other the same time."

"What other?"

"The Richard. I shall allus say 'S'Richard' to myself."

"Very well, do. But, mind—I trust you."

"And you may, sir. It seems to me—as I was going to say—if you won't be offended—"

"Go on, man," cried Richard; "nothing will offend me now."

"Oh! won't it? You're as big a honourable gent now as ever you was; but, if you was to go to your cousin, sir, he'd call you a impostor."

"I'm afraid so, Jerry."

"And, if you turn nasty with him, he'll tell you to go down in the country there, and look at your grave."

Dick was silent.

"But don't you be downhearted, sir. You shall have your rights. What d'ye say to sending a petition to the Queen? I'm told that she's a very nice old lady, when you know her."

Dick laughed.

"Why should she believe me?"

"Because you're a gent, sir. Anybody could see that with half a heye. But, look here, sir, there—"

"Will you leave off saying 'sir'? I am Dick Smithson."

"Oh, very well, Dick Smithson. There must be a way out of the wood. What do you say to me killing him—by accident?"

"I say, talk sense, man!"

"Right; I will. I wish I was in your regiment, though. One could see you oft'ner like, and settle things with you. I s'pose if I was to desert and 'list in yours, they'd make a row about it?"

"No doubt about that, Jerry."

"There wouldn't be no harm. I should only have changed from one regiment to another."

"You know enough about a soldier's duties to the colours, man. But I wish you were in the 205th with all my heart."

"And in your company? I could valet you just as I used to."

"Nonsense! I'm not in any company; and for me to have a servant would be impossible as well as absurd."

"Well, I can't see as it would be absurd, because you, being a gent, ought to have your servant. But, to come back to my being in your regiment—ain't there no way of managing it?"

"I don't know, Jerry. Officers exchange."

"There you are: allus a way out of a difficulty, if you can find it. Officers exchange; why shouldn't privates? I could be no end o' use to you, Dick Smithson. S'pose we try?"

Dick laughed, and shook his head.

"Impossible, Jerry! We must be content as we are for the present, and meet now and then, and talk matters over till I see my way to get out of this position."

And it was in this way that they parted.

About a week later Dick was summoned to the lieutenant's rooms; and, upon reaching them, it was quite plain that something was wrong. For Lacey looked black as thunder as he walked up and down.

"What have I done to offend him?" thought Dick, as he waited for the young officer to speak.

"Sit down!" growled Lacey; and Dick obeyed.

"It's beyond bearing!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "I'll clean my own boots, and brush my own clothes. I'm sick of it!"

"Nothing to do with me," thought Dick; and he ventured a remark.

"Can I help you in any way, sir?"

"No—yes; play something soothing to me. I'm put out. No, don't. It's like making a fool of myself."

Dick thought so, too, but he did not say anything; while the lieutenant went on pacing the room for a few minutes, and then faced round.

"What do you think he has done now?"

"Who, sir—the colonel?"

"Bah! no: that idiot servant of mine?"

"Broke something, sir?"

"No!" roared the lieutenant; "I wish he had—his neck! Can I trust you, Smithson?"

Dick bowed.

"Yes; one can confide in you, Smithson. You remember—er—er—a little adventure of ours—the serenade?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"I hardly care to refer to it, Smithson; but, as I think I said before, I always feel as if I can trust you."

Dick bowed again, and felt disposed to laugh; but his face was extra-serious as the lieutenant went on—

"The fact is, we made a great mistake, Smithson, and that duet was played under the wrong window. There is an aunt there—and—and—she is not young."

"I presumed so, sir, from the voice," said Dick, for the young officer waited.

"There is no presumption about it, Smithson; you were quite right. She is still single. Miss—well—er—since then—er—we have met."

"You and the aunt, sir?"

"Smithson, this is no matter for ribald jest," said the lieutenant, sharply.

"I beg pardon, sir; I meant to be quite serious."

"I thank you, Smithson. You will grasp what I mean when you grow older. You may come to feel as I have felt for months past."

"I hope not!" thought Dick.

"I will continue, Smithson. We have met since, more than once; and yesterday I sent that idiot with a note."

"And he gave it to the wrong person, sir?"

"What! You have heard?"

"Oh, no, sir; but it is what I should have expected him to do."

"You are quite right; and I ought to have known better. He took the letter, and delivered it to the aunt. Smithson, I am in agony! She has responded to me, thinking my words were meant for her. I walked by there an hour ago and saw her, and—oh, Smithson!—she smiled. What is to be done?"

Dick was silent for a minute, not knowing how to answer the question; then a way out of the difficulty came.

"I'll tell you, sir! You must discharge that fellow."

"I did, Smithson—at once. I was in such a rage that I kicked him; and I fear that there will be some trouble about that, if he reports it to his superior officer."

"Pooh! Give him half a sovereign, sir, and you'll hear no more about it."

"That's very good advice, Smithson. I wish I had your head."

"You want a good, clever, smart servant, sir," said Dick, who was breathless with excitement consequent upon his new idea.

"Yes, Smithson; but such a treasure seems to be unobtainable."

"I don't know—I think I could find you such a man, sir."

"You could! Oh, no; I want a regular valet, Smithson. I have grown sadly indolent, and I often wish a war would break out to rouse me up."

"This is a regular valet, sir."

"But—really, Smithson, I'm afraid I'm very lazy—can he shave?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and cut hair admirably."

"Indeed? A friend of yours?"

"Well, sir, not exactly; I used to know him."

"Whose company is he in?"

"Unfortunately, sir, he is not in this regiment."

"Smithson! how can you?" cried the lieutenant in lachrymose tones. "What is the use of raising my hopes to dash them down? Is he a man of bad character who wants to join?"

"No, sir; he is a soldier already; but he is in the 310th, sir—the regiment we 'played in' the other day."

"In the 310th?" said the lieutenant, thoughtfully.

"And, of course, not available, sir."

"Is he anyone else's servant?"

"He is simply a private, sir."

"Then— I don't know, though. Perhaps I might—or I could—I— how tiresome!"

For at that moment Dick sprang from his seat, as he heard steps outside.

"You at home, Lacey?" cried a voice.

"Yes: come in."

As the door opened, the lieutenant said excitedly—

"What is this man's name?"

"Jeremiah Brigley, sir;" and the young officer carefully put down the name before Dick retreated and took his leave, the new arrival saying:

"Here, Smithson, I shall want you to give me some lessons, too."

The next minute Dick was crossing the barrack yard to reach his quarters, wondering whether it would be possible for Jerry to be exchanged, and meeting the bandmaster, who said rather gruffly—

"Where have you been, sir?"

"To Mr Lacey's, sir."

"Ha! I hope I shall find out that this is the truth."

Dick flushed.

"There is too much lesson-giving, and the band practice is neglected. Be good enough to recollect, sir, that I have reported your conduct."

"I don't understand you, sir," replied Dick.

"I allude to that episode, sir, when you absented yourself from the practice without leave. Your conduct is not what it should be, sir. And recollect this: that a man picked up, as you were, in the street ought to be doubly careful when he has got a lift in life; so have a care, sir—have a care."

"I am sorry I absented myself, sir," began Dick, but Wilkins raised himself on tiptoe, and interrupted him.

"Say 'stopped away,' sir. Leave 'absented' to your officers. There's too much favouritism in this regiment; but I warn you, sir: have a care—have a care."

He strutted away, arranging the few thin bits of hair about his ears, leaving Dick looking after him.

"Oh, you stupid little man!" muttered Dick, who then went to his quarters to think out what he had better do. But, try hard as he would, he could not think it out; for the more he thought, the more it seemed to him that he had completely obliterated himself by his foolish act—that Sir Richard Frayne was dead to the world and Dick Smithson reigned in his stead.

Chapter Twenty Six.

Finding a Leech.

Dick Smithson was busy, a few mornings later, working with his hands as well as his brain. The latter could not succeed in its task; for, the more he thought, the more desperate grew the confusion in his mind; and, by way of relief, he tried hard to dismiss the whole business, but only to find that it would not go.

His hands were more successful; for he had polished his sword, pipe-clayed his belt, gloves, and the little leather pouch which held his music-cards, and now, with a brush ready, he was performing a task which looked like a puzzle, for he was passing the gilt buttons of his uniform through a hole in a flat stick, and then running them one after another along a slit.

He had heard someone enter the room; but he was too intent upon his work to look up, and he had just picked up the brush to begin polishing the buttons, now in a neat row, when a couple of hands were passed round him—one taking his jacket and button-stick, the other the brush, which was briskly applied, accompanied by a loud, hissing noise, such as an ostler makes, to blow away the dust, when grooming a horse.

"Jerry!" exclaimed Dick, wonderingly.

"Me it is, S'Rich—Dick Smithson," cried the man, cheerily.

"For goodness' sake, mind what you are saying."

"I will, sir—I will, Dick—but it is so hard to break off your old habits."

"And give me that brush. You must not go on like this."

"Why not?" cried Jerry; "I often do jobs for my mates. There's no rules again' that. Why, I could clean up, polish, and pipe-clay twice as fast as some of 'em."

"But what brings you here, Jerry?"

"Ah! that's it, S'Dick Smithson!" cried the man, with a smile of triumph. "It's all right; I'm taken in exchange."

"What!"

"They've swopped me, somehow. I don't know; but I don't belong to the Three-tenth no longer. I'm a Two-fifth, and, what's more, I'm Lieutenant Lacey's servant. I've been with him two days."

"And are you satisfied? Can you get on?"

"Satisfied ain't the word for it. I was never meant to go shouldering arms and making two legs of a long centipede, and crawling about. It's like getting back into real happiness. Waited table last night for the fust time. Didn't you see me?"

"I? No."

"I see you tootling away there on your floom, 'eavenly, but I couldn't catch your eye. 'Sides, I was strange there, and had to mind what I was about, 'tending to my master. It was a real treat!"

"And so you think you'll get on with him?"

"Get on with him! Why, I can do anything I like with him already! My word! they call red herrings sogers, and sogers red herrings, and he is a soft-roed un, and no mistake."

"Lieutenant Lacey is a thorough gentleman, Jerry," cried Dick, warmly.

"Every inch of him, Dick Smithson—mind, I'm a calling you that, Dick, but it's meant respectful—a thorough gent, every inch of him, and there's a good lot on him, too; but he is a bit slack-baked, you know. Why, if I liked, I could a'most gammon him into anything."

"I trust you will prove as good a servant to him as you were to—"

"Me," Dick was going to say, but he checked himself.

"You trust me for that, Dick Smithson, I will. But, really, it's shameful the way he's been neglected. He come and ketched me last night sitting on the floor cross-legged, fine-drawing a hole in his dress-vest, and he burst out a-laughing, good-humoured like.

"Why, Brigley," he says, 'I didn't know you were a tailor.'

"More I am, sir," I says; 'but a man as pretends to valet a gent, and can't draw up a tear, or put on a button, ain't worth calling a servant, sir,' I says.

"I'm afraid my things have been very much neglected," he says, and then he asked, 'What boots are those in a row?'

"Some as I found in the closet, sir, all over mould.'

"But they're not fit to wear, are they?'

"Why not, sir?" I says. 'Look here, sir, that chap as you've had here ought to be flogged; I never see a gent's fit-out and accoutrements in such a state.'

"They have been terribly neglected, my man," he says, 'and I hope you'll put 'em right.'

"You trust me, sir," I says, 'and they shall be done proper, but it'll take me weeks yet. Your linen's shameful.'

"Then I must get some new things.'

"What for, sir?" I says. 'They're right enough. Leastwise, they will be. You leave 'em to me, sir.'

"I will, my man," he says.

"And then he sits down and sighs. Ever heard him sigh, sir?"

"Yes, often, Jerry."

"An' he can sigh! 'Tired, sir?' I says.

"Yes, and low-spirited,' he says.

"I didn't say no more, but puts away the vest as I'd finished, all but pressing it. Then I takes out my cloth, gets his pair of ivory-back brushes, just takes off his dress-jacket, and puts the cloth round his neck, sets him up a bit, and then I brushed his head for about ten minutes—you know my way, sir?"

"Yes, Jerry; I recollect."

"And there he sat, with the wrinkles going out of his forrid, and a sort o' baby-like smile coming all over his face.

"Find it fresh'ning, sir?' I says.

"Heavenly,' he says.

"You want a good shampoo, sir,' I says. 'There's a deal o' dandruff in your head.'

"That's what the hairdresser said,' says he, an' he sighs again.

"Oh, yes; I know,' says I; 'they allus do, and wants you to buy bottles o' their tintry-cum-fuldicus. You leave it to me, sir. Little white o' egg and borax, and a finish off with some good scented soap; and then if anyone sees some o' that stuff in your head, sir, just you tell me.'

"He's a very nice gent, sir—I mean Dick; but the way he's been neglected and preyed on by barbers and sich is shameful. Why, he's got stuff enough in his quarters to stock a shop."

"Then you think you'll get on with him, Jerry?"

"Think? Not me! You ask him if he'll let me go, and you'll see. I sent him out this morning pretty tidy to parade, quite early—and don't he like you to dress him—and when he come back, looking done-up, I was ready for him with a pick-me-up. You see there's a lot of him, and he want nootriment."

"What's this?' he says.

"Your lotion, sir,' I says, and he tasted it, and tasted it again, sipping, then mouthfulling, and sets the glass down, with a sigh.

“What is it, Brigley?” he says.

“Noo-lade egg, sir, noo milk, lump o’ sugar, and half a glass o’ sherry, well lathered up with a swizzle-stick.”

“Hah!” he says, ‘is there any more?’

“No, sir,” I says; ‘not this morning. Now then, sir,’ I says; ‘if you please?’ And then I takes off his belts and his regimentals, gets him on the couch, and I rubs him and cracks him.”

“You did what?” cried Dick.

“Massages him, sir; and him a-staring at me all the time. After that I shampoos and washes him, trims the pyntes off his hair, waxes his starshers, gives him a cigarette, and then I rejoices his heart.”

“How?” said Dick, laughing.

“By telling on him the truth, sir.”

“What truth?”

“I stood back and looked at him, and I says to him: ‘There, sir; don’t you feel like a new man?’

“Ah, yes! he says, with one o’ those big mellingcholly sighs of his’n, which makes me think he’s got something on his mind.

“And now, sir,” I says, ‘you look puffect.’

“Oh, nonsense, man!” he says, sharply.

“Begging your pardon, sir!” I says, ‘you do!’ and he says, sadly—

“Well, Brigley, have it your own way; ‘tis no fault of mine.’

“I see then as I oughtn’t to say no more, for fear of his thinking I flattered him. But, really, he is as handsome and big a chap as ever I did see.”

“Yes, he is good-looking, Jerry; but if you talk much like that you’ll disgust him.”

“An’ I shan’t talk to him like that again, Dick Smithson; and I shouldn’t, then, only it was the honest truth. It’s a pleasure to

do up a gent like that! Why, I could win a prize with him at a show! But he is a soft one, really!—milk's nothing to him!"

"Never mind that, Jerry. You'll find him an excellent master."

"I know I shall, and thankful I am; for it's been a rough time with me lately, and it's refreshing to have to do for such a gent. He really is, though, the handsomest chap I ever see out of a picture, though he do make me laugh to find him such a hinfant. Think he could fight?"

"I think he's brave as a lion, Jerry; and that it would be awkward for anyone who roused him up."

"That's yer sort for me, sir. I call that real English."

"And he'd be clever enough, if put to the test. But he's well-off, and takes life easily. You've got a good master, Jerry; and you know it."

"I do, Dick Smithson; and I want him to know he's got a good servant."

"Oh, he'll find that out, Jerry. Yes! you were going to say something?"

"I were, sir—I mean Dick Smithson. Did you know as he was friends with your cousin?"

"No, surely not!"

"Fact, sir. He come to Mr Lacey's quarters this morning. I was sewing on buttons in the next room, and couldn't help hearing something about odds; and that set me up sharp, for I knows what odds mean—no one better."

"But you shouldn't have listened."

"I didn't, Dick Smithson; but I heered enough to show as S'Mark—I—I beg your pardon."

Dick started; but he said nothing, and Jerry went on.

"As your cousin's feeling his way with Mr Lacey—and, if he is, it means betting and play, and bleeding of him orful. Couldn't you give him a hint, as someone we knows ain't to be trusted?"

Dick was silent for a few moments, and then said between his teeth—

"No, Jerry. Mr Lacey—if my cousin is a scoundrel—must find it out for himself."

"But that seems hard," said Jerry.

"It will be hard for Mark Frayne if there's anything wrong. Mr Lacey is not such a—"

"Fool as he looks? that was what you was going to say. Well, I'm glad o' that."

And Jerry soon after took his leave, telling Dick not to be downhearted, for things would come right.

"Yes," muttered Jerry, "and the guv'nor jolly soon will find out about Mr Mark. If I was him, I'd lock up my money—and my young lady, too."

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Dick pipes—His Cousin dances.

A loud cough, the twinkling of Mr Wilkins' spectacles, and a peculiar clearing of the voice, which made Sergeant Brumpton, who had been hard at work making ominous sounds on the bombardon, turn his head and smile at Dick—then standing in his place waiting to begin—and making him lower his head to examine the music; for, if he had smiled there, just in front of the bandmaster, it must have been seen, and taken as an insult.

"I have just received a communication from the colonel," said Mr Wilkins. "We are to have a ball at the mess-room, and the 310th are coming. I shall have a few picked men from their band to make up, but, of course, ours will take the lead. Let me see: Granger, you'll get out your double-bass; Robson and Dean, violins; Boston, cornet—you lead clarionet and hautboy; Brown, bassoon. I suppose we must have you, Smithson—one flute will be enough. The 310th will furnish two violins and a 'cello. That ought to make a strong band."

The men who did not play stringed instruments, or such as were suitable for a ball-room, looked disappointed; and Sergeant Brumpton, as he sat with his huge instrument between his legs, looked down into its great brass bell-mouth and sighed.

That was news which set Dick's heart beating. The officers of the 310th would be there; he would be in the orchestra, and his cousin would be constantly coming close by where he was playing.

And Dick thought about their last meeting and the contemptuous, haughty way in which Mark had gazed in his eyes.

"Could he have recognised me," thought Dick; "or was it his manner only?"

There was a strange fascination in the idea of meeting Mark that was almost magnetic; but, at the same time, it was accompanied by a feeling akin to shrinking, which for the moment Dick cast aside as best he could.

He had no occasion to fear the encounter, he told himself; and from that moment he waited patiently for the evening.

There was plenty to do previously, for Wilkins insisted upon several band practices of the dance-music, greatly to the disgust of the better musicians, who were ready to play the pieces at sight.

Then the evening came. The mess-man had done his best; a tent-maker had come down from town to build a canvas hall, draped red and white; and a local man had fitted the marquee with gas and floor complete for a supper-room. Tempting refreshments were provided, and a nurseryman had contrived a natural garden here and there, not forgetting to make a cosy nest for the band. The officers of the two regiments meant to do the thing well, cost what it might, and the invitations had been looked upon as prizes for miles round.

There was an hour to wait before the first guests were likely to arrive, and Dick sat in the band-room low-spirited and dreamy; for the festivity seemed a trouble now, and he would have given anything to have been able to keep away.

Naturally, his principal thought was his cousin, but he more than once asked himself why he should trouble about Mark; for,

possibly, he might not come, and, even if he did, they were not in the least likely to come face to face.

Still, the idea would return; and he was at his moodiest when the door opened and a familiar voice said:

"Ah! there you are."

"Jerry!"

"Jerry it is, Dick Smithson. I say, do go and have a look at him."

"At him?"

"Yes, the lieutenant; I've made a picture of him. New uniform fresh from the tailor's; I've shampooed him and brushed him, and scented him till he smells like a bed of flowers, and he's all in a nervous flutter as he sits there, afraid to smoke or do anything before the company come. Can't you go up and have a look?"

"No, Jerry; I should be disposed to laugh."

"That you would. I had hard work to keep from it myself; but he isn't to be laughed at either, for, without any gammon, he's the finest fellow I ever saw, and a real gentleman as well."

"Yes; I like him," said Dick, quietly.

"Three pairs of white kid gloves in his pockets and three scented handkerchiefs. He's got a buttonhole on; and I've got three more in water, to have ready for him during the evening. I'm to be waiting for him when he wants a fresh one. I say, Dick Smithson, there's going to be a special lady here to-night, I know."

"Very likely, Jerry. Such a man as he is will, of course, have someone he admires."

"Then you won't go and see him?"

Dick shook his head.

"He'd like it. He didn't say so; but he told me to be sure that you had plenty of refreshment. I'm to look after you. He said you'd have lots of work; so that you ought to be looked after."

"It's very kind of him," said Dick, with his eyes brightening at the idea of his having made a friend.

"And I shan't forget to attend to his orders. I say, go over to his quarters."

"What for? I've no excuse for going."

"Oh, yes; you have. He's on the committee. Go and ask him if he has any orders to give about the music."

"I am not the bandmaster, Jerry; but I will go. There's just time before going to the ball-room."

"That's right; I like pleasing anyone who behaves well to you."

There was none too much time, but Dick had only to walk into the orchestra with his flute-case under his arm; so, hurrying away, he ran across the barrack yard, entered the officers' quarters unquestioned, and made his way to the first floor.

"Come in!" came, in a gruff voice, in answer to a modest tap. "That you, Brigley?"

"No, sir; I came to see if you wished to send any message to Mr Wilkins about the music."

"Bother Wilkins!" growled the lieutenant. "I believe he'll make a muddle of it all. Can't you conduct, Smithson?"

"I, sir? Oh, no. I think it will go all right."

"I'm doubtful; but, look here—I want the music to be well-marked, and, if it's going wrong, you get the other fellows to help you. Keep it all well going."

"I will, sir."

"I've told Brigley to see that you chaps have plenty of supper and what you want to drink. I say, Smithson—"

"Yes, sir. Thank you for your thought of us."

"Thought of you; why, of course, thought of you. You fellows have to keep the thing going. But I say—"

"Yes, sir."

"Do I—er—do I look all right?"

The lieutenant rose, and took a turn up and down the room.

"Splendid, sir!"

"No, no; don't humbug, Smithson. Tell me the truth. It's a new uniform; does it fit all right?"

"I tell you it's splendid, sir! You couldn't look better. There will be no one in the room who can touch you."

"Think not?" said Lacey, dubiously.

"I'm sure of it, sir."

"Well, I'm glad you think so, Smithson. The colonel was here just now smoking one of those strong cigars of his. Do I smell of it?"

"I can smell scent, sir—nothing else."

"That's right. Well, he said something like you did; but I always get so nervous, and feel as if he was chaffing me. You see, I want to look well to-night. You know why, Smithson."

"Yes, sir; I can guess."

"Of course. She's coming."

"I guessed that, too, sir."

"I don't care much how I look, for dressing yourself up takes a lot of trouble, let alone the expense. I say, you do mean it, Smithson?"

"You may always believe me, sir," said Dick, quietly.

"Of course—I know that. I say, Smithson: I wish you were in the mess instead of the band."

Dick laughed feebly.

"Perhaps I'm best where I am, sir. But I must go now, and get in my place. It's close upon the time."

"By George, yes! I say, want a pair of white kids, Smithson? You'll find some in that box."

"Thanks; no, sir. I hope you'll have a pleasant evening."

"Thank you, Smithson. Keep them up to it with the waltzes."

Dick gave a hasty promise, and then hurried down and into the flower-decked vestibule, which was entered by a covered passage festooned with lamps. Then he crossed the temporary ball-room, with its well-waxed floor, took a glance at the great marquee laid out for supper, at another arranged for tea, coffee, and ices, with various cups for the gentlemen, and beyond that at another prepared for those who chose to smoke, the whole being lit up by a blaze of light, and draped here and there with military and naval flags and cleverly-designed trophies of arms.

It was but a passing glance, which filled Dick with a tingling of pleasure and disappointment, for he recalled the lieutenant's words about the mess. Then he hurried to his place, being the last to arrive, and found Wilkins glaring at him through his glasses.

"Late again, Smithson!" he said, harshly; and, as he spoke, the brazen voice of the clock told him he spoke falsely; for Dick was in his place to the moment, and joined in the rustling made by his comrades, as they arranged their music in accordance with the programme, and then waited patiently.

A few minutes later, the colonel and a group of officers came round to see that all was perfect, headed by the major and one of the captains, who had undertaken to see that the decorations were effective.

"Capital!" cried the colonel. "The band, with their scarlet and gold, amongst the flowers and palms, give the best bit of effect I have seen. Yes, and those colours hang well over them."

"Glad you're satisfied," said the major.

"More," said the colonel. "By the way, Wilkins, let your men keep on their caps for the first hour—it looks more effective. When the dancing is in full swing, you can do as you like."

"Yes, sir. What I had planned," said the bandmaster, obsequiously.

They moved on, and a quarter of an hour passed; then, according to arrangement, the brass band of the regiment struck up outside and played a selection, as the first carriages

began to arrive, but only one set for fear of their strains interfering with those in the ball-room.

The first half-hour was devoted to a kind of reception, by which time the guests had grown thick enough to well fill the room, and then, punctual to the moment—dancing at nine—the band struck up, and the floor was covered with couples, the uniforms of the military and naval officers blending with the ladies' charming toilettes and flowers, and the few orthodox black dress-coats adding to, rather than detracting from, the general effect.

Dick's position at one end in the front gave him plenty of opportunity for seeing the dancers, and the simple music caused but little necessity for watching his notes, so that he was able to gaze to his heart's content at the kaleidoscopic throng, and before long had watched with some interest the tall figure of Lieutenant Lacey, wondering which of the ladies he danced with was the one they had serenaded that night.

He had settled upon one after the other, and credited the lieutenant with excellent taste; then believed he must be wrong, for, after dancing with his fourth partner—a tall, sweet-faced, graceful girl—he saw him lead her up to a thin, washed-out lady, of—well, middle age; and the next moment a sweet, silvery voice said—

"Pray, take aunt to have an ice, Lieutenant Lacey!"

The lieutenant bowed and smiled, offered his arm, and, as his partner took the elderly lady's place, the latter was led off.

"The lady of the serenade!" thought Dick, without hearing her voice.

Almost directly after, as Dick was arranging a fresh sheet of music on his desk, but watching the fair-haired, graceful girl at the same time, his heart suddenly gave a bound, for he saw the major approaching, with a handsome, manly-looking young officer, who, with a half-contemptuous smile, was listening to his companion's remarks.

They came on to where the young lady was seated not five yards away, and the next instant, as he stood there as if turned to stone, Dick heard every word spoken, and the major introducing Sir Mark Frayne to Miss Deane. Then they were left together, and Mark Frayne busily entered his name in three places upon the lady's programme, her name upon his own;

after which he began creating the customary small talk, but at the same time seemed to be a good deal impressed by his new partner's personal appearance.

It might have been Dick's jealous anger which caused his thoughts to take this direction as he stood there, feeling his breath come short, and as if he must go out at once, clap his cousin on the shoulder, and say, "Here! I want to speak to you at once."

And all the while Mark was so close that nearly all his remarks and the lady's replies were perfectly audible.

As Dick still gazed, stern and forbidding-looking, Lacey came slowly back with the thin, elderly lady, and as Mark Frayne saw by his partner's look that someone was approaching, he turned sharply.

"Ah, Lacey, old fellow," he said, "I have just been securing Miss Deane for the next dance."

"Take off your cap!"

Lacey said something, but Dick did not hear what, and the niece rose to give up her place, and then accepted Mark Frayne's arm.

"Take off your cap, sir!"

"Don't forget I come next but one, Miss Deane," said Lacey.

"Oh, no; I will not forget," she replied, with a pleasant smile.

"Will you attend to me, and take—off—your—cap, sir?" came sharply from behind Dick, who started, coloured, and snatched off his cap, conscious now that the bandmaster was speaking to him, and the words had been heard by Mark Frayne and his partner, to whom Mark made some playful remark, at which she smiled, as they both gazed at the young bandsman.

Then, as Dick's eyes met his cousin's with an angry stare, the latter's countenance changed, and he gave an involuntary start, but tossed his head in a contemptuous manner the next moment as he passed on, bending down to say something to the lady.

Then *tap—tap—tap* went Wilkins' baton, the band played a short introduction, and then glided off into one of Waldteuffel's

waltzes; and, as Dick played, the cold perspiration stood out upon his forehead, while his eyes followed the couple as they went on down one side of the long mess-room, passed across, and then easily and gracefully swung round and round as they approached. Once they were quite close, and then passed him so near that he could have stretched out his hand, leaned forward, and touched Mark Frayne, who, however, never once lifted his eyes all through the dance, evidently forgetful, in his efforts to make himself agreeable, of the countenance which had given him so sudden a shock.

For, after he had started on the waltz, he had dismissed the idea with one word—

“Absurd!”

Chapter Twenty Eight.

The Alarm.

Dance succeeded dance; the refreshment-room was visited in the intervals; and, as the various couples passed the musicians, scraps of their conversation told, from time to time, how great a success the ball was considered to be; while, among the faces, all looked bright and animated except two—those of Dick and Lieutenant Lacey—who, between the dances, came by the orchestra several times to attend to the two ladies seated near, but more often to the elderly lady alone.

For the big, handsome Adonis of the regiment was by no means happy. He told himself that he was not in the least jealous; but he had anticipated taking the lady of his choice in to supper and been thwarted by that lady's aunt, who had said, sweetly:

“I shall expect you to take me in to supper, Lieutenant Lacey. Sir Mark Frayne has kindly said that he will see to my niece.”

As for Dick, he worked hard at his task, and tried to think of nothing else but the waltzes, polkas, and quadrilles; and, consequently, thought of them hardly at all, but of the handsome young officer in scarlet, who came again and again to where the Deanes were seated—the last time just as supper was announced, at the break between the two divisions of the music.

"Almost a pity to stop the dances," said Mark, as he offered his arm to Miss Deane. And Dick saw that the lady darted a deprecating look at Lacey, who offered his arm to the aunt, and joined in the long line of dancers trooping out to the great marquee, now opened for the first time by the drawing back of the heavy drapery which had hidden the interior from the guests.

For the officers had determined that there should be no scrambled-for, stand-up supper, but a comfortably-arranged meal, with seats for every guest; while now a hurried movement was made by the band to a fresh orchestra inside the marquee, which was reached by a ladder from the back, and a selection of operatic airs was commenced at once to the rattle of knife, fork, and plate, and jingle of glass.

The marquee was soon crowded; and from high up where he stood Dick had a good view of the prettiest part of the scene; while, as he played, his eyes wandered round and round in search of Mark, to find, after a time, that he had overlooked him: for he was seated with Miss Deane, almost below and to the right, while Lacey was with the aunt on the other side of the table—one of the four which reached from end to end.

Once he had made out where they were, Dick could hardly keep his eyes off his cousin, who was evidently, to the lady's annoyance, making himself far too attentive; while, more than once, it was plain to see from Lacey's lowering countenance that a storm was brewing.

But Lacey was a steward for the occasion, and more than once servants came up to him for orders and instructions; while Jerry, who was busily seeing to the wants of those at that end of the table, was also going about, apparently with messages to the colonel and major.

"What an abominable smell of gas!" said Wilkins, after a piece or two had been played.

"Yes, sir; I noticed it as we came up here first."

"Humph! the pipes not properly joined, I suppose," said Wilkins. "Play the next."

Then a selection from Sullivan's operas was played, but half-drowned by the noise from the tables.

"This gas is suffocating up here," said the bandmaster, calling attention to it again.

"Yes, sir; I wonder they don't grumble down below."

"Humph! all up here, and along the upper part of the tent," grumbled the bandmaster; and then his attention was taken off by the appearance of Jerry through the curtain of canvas opening upon the orchestra.

"Lieutenant Lacey, sir, says the band needn't play no more during supper; and there's refreshments all ready in the little tent outside."

"Oh, thanks!" cried Wilkins. "Bring your instruments and music, and then we needn't come up here again before we go to the ball-room. Halloo! you smell it?"

"Yes, sir," said Jerry, who had been sniffing loudly. "Someone's been turning on the gas here, and no mistake! Temp'ry pipes, I suppose."

"Doesn't it smell down below?"

"Yes, I did notice it a bit, sir, all along the tables; but nothing like this."

"Never mind; let's get out of it. Soon blow away."

Wilkins set the example, and hurried out and down the step-ladder, which took them outside, and, followed by the bandsmen, he made for the little tent where their supper was laid.

They had to pass the end of the great marquee, and Dick and Jerry, who were last, paused, while the latter drew the drapery a little on one side, holding it back before letting it fall after him.

"I must get back to my table, sir," he said. "Like a peep from here?"

Dick nodded and stood at the opening, gazing along the marquee toward the opening into the mess-room at the other end, the effect being very beautiful, with the long row of gaseliers and the vista of flags and red and white striped drapery running up to the narrow ridge of the roof.

But Dick saw nothing of this; his eyes sought the group right at the other end beneath the little elevated orchestra he had just left, and he was just making out where his cousin sat when there was a flash like sheet-lightning running along the upper part of the canvas, reaching from end to end. He felt himself thrust violently back, as he seemed to be struck with something heavy and soft; then there was a deep, dull report, as of thunder, and all was dark, while from where the marquee had stood there came wild shrieks, cries for help, and a strange babel of sounds, which, issuing from beneath what in the darkness looked like a chaotic sea, were for the most part smothered and strange.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

A fiery Trial.

It needed no explanation. Dick grasped in an instant, as he sprang to his feet, that the whole roof of the marquee had become filled with escaped gas, and that at last this had exploded, bursting up the canvas, which had fallen back with the chandeliers, drapery, flags, decorations, and broken poles on the gaily-dressed crowd within, burying them helplessly.

The shrieks and cries increased as Dick tore off back along the side of the fallen tent, heedless of the heaving and sinking of the canvas and the figures struggling out beneath the edges. For he had but one thought: to get in by the way he had come and try and help those he knew—Lacey and the tall, fair girl who had been seated there a few minutes before.

As he reached the mess-room end the smothered cries and shrieks were horrible; but people were struggling out fast now, and officers in uniform could be seen dragging ladies from beneath the canvas. In other places, knives were being plunged through and slits made from within, out of which hands appeared, and, the holes being enlarged, people were rapidly dragged out by the servants and soldiers who came hurrying up from the barrack yard and by those who had been outside listening.

And all the time, amidst the hubbub of cries, appeals, and groans, the canvas kept on heaving where the frightened, suffocating people beneath were struggling together now and fighting vainly to escape.

Suddenly one of the bandsmen put his cornet to his lips and blew a familiar call, with the result that a number of the soldiers fell into line. One of the escaped officers began to give short, sharp, decisive orders, and then, leading and directing the men, an attack was made upon the canvas ropes. Stakes were torn up, and great openings made, out of which numbers escaped—the ladies with their gay ball habiliments torn, their hair dishevelled, many of them to fall fainting and be borne into the ball-room by the side entrance.

These efforts were soon being continued on all sides, the military discipline displaying itself more and more as the officers got free and then kept back the gathering crowd and those who made frantic efforts to help, but only hindered, the workers. The doctors were established in the tea-room, which was turned into a hospital, and the insensible and injured were rapidly borne in to them, while the cooler people who kept their heads, assisted.

It was quite time that the aid was effectual, for now a fresh horror was making itself evident. The explosion had resulted in darkness; but in two places smoke was arising, and one of these spots was where the canvas and poles lay thickest, and from whence Dick, who worked frantically, had dragged over a dozen people out, and helped to bear others who lay insensible, suffocated by those who had fallen and crushed them down.

Again and again he had plunged in under the canvas, feeling in the darkness amidst entangled chairs, portions of the table, with the chaos of broken china, glass, and cutlery, hoping that he was exactly in the place where Miss Deane must be, but always disappointed and helping to carry out someone else.

At last, when the fire began to burn, and the suffocating smoke to roll out, people hung back, and cries were raised for the engine and for buckets of water. But the barrack engine was already there, at the far end of the wreck, and the soldiers who manned it were striving hard to get out the hose and fit it together.

"My niece! my niece!" shrieked a voice close by; and, recognising the frantic woman who strove to escape from those who held her and to aid in the search, Dick made a fresh plunge in beneath the canvas, working round, cutting himself badly, and still in vain, till, half-suffocated, he was forced to try and creep back, but only to find that there in the darkness, where he was crawling, he had lost his way.

For a few minutes his senses reeled, and he felt as if all were over; but he recovered directly, for, in groping along, his hands touched something soft—a warm, bare arm, and the next minute he realised its owner's position. She was held tightly by someone, and there were pieces of the frame of the marquee and a portion of a pole forcing them down; while over all the folds of the canvas and drapery lay thick.

Left to himself Dick, and those whom he had found, must have perished; but as he struggled up, and beat at the tent overhead, there arose assuring shouts from without. Orders were given; as many men as could get a grip of the canvas seized it, and, just as Dick's senses were going, a strip of the marquee was dragged from over them, and then willing hands extricated the lady and the officer, who had evidently fallen with her while trying to bear her forth.

A few moments in the free air revived Dick, and he gasped out, as the men around began to talk—

"Who—who was it?"

"Mr Lacey—a lady," were the words that came back. That was enough. He felt sure of whom it would be, and turned once more towards the ridge of wood and canvas, from which flames were now beginning to leap.

"Keep back, my lad! Are you mad?" shouted an officer.—"Here—quick now—pass buckets!"

Dick's answer was to give his hand a wave and dash right in among the smoke, two soldiers who tried to stop him just missing his arm as he plunged in.

"Here, who was that?" cried the colonel, who now came up, panting.

"One of the bandsmen, sir—the lad must have gone mad!"

"No," cried the colonel; "he must have known that someone was still there. The orchestra was there at that end; he has gone to save one of his comrades. Pass the buckets, my lads.—A dozen, here: take this piece of canvas and haul!"

The men seized the piece pointed out and dragged at it, when a volume of smoke rolled forth; and as they got it farther away, and let in the air, there was a flash of light and then a report, as a jet of flame shot up into the air, followed by a steady,

fluttering spurt of light, for a huge jet from a broken gas-pipe burned furiously.

"No matter—no good!" cried the colonel. "Keep back with those buckets! Who knows where they fitted the valve to turn this off?"

There was no answer, and the place now grew light; the woodwork began to blaze, the canvas to emit huge clouds of smoke, and the men around kept on making dashes in to try and find the lad who had entered the burning wreck.

It was all plain enough to see; the broken gas-pipe was flaring on the shattered woodwork of the orchestra, and this and the tables and chairs upon which it had fallen were burning fiercely, and lighting up the crowd of soldiers, officers, guests, and ladies who, less hurt than their companions, were fascinated by the scene.

"There's a man in there burning," shouted the colonel—"perhaps two. Volunteers, follow me!"

He led the brave fellows, who sprang forward right into the fire and smoke; but they were beaten back, scorched and blinded, and an awful silence fell upon the crowd, while the woodwork crackled and sputtered and the gas-main sent forth its great waving pillar of flame, roaring with a sonorous note; and all felt that the scarlet-coated figure they had seen leap in had gone to his death.

Just then up came, running, several men dragging the fire-engine hose, led by one bearing the bright copper branch.

"Now pump!" shouted an officer; but the order was checked by a yell of "No!" as the back of a figure was suddenly seen leaning toward them; then a couple of steps were taken, and it was seen that whoever it was had hold of another's arm, and was dragging him out.

With a cheer, half a dozen men—one of whom was Jerry—sprang in through the burning woodwork, and dragged both out into safety, to be borne directly after—just recognisable as a bandsman and an officer—through the mess-room to where the doctors were hard at work, but so far without having had one serious case.

Dick was the first to come to, just as the colonel hurried in for a few moments to inquire how the two injured men were, and

came up to where the doctor was kneeling by the young fellow, applying cottonwool and oil to his burned hands.

"How is he?" said the colonel, anxiously.

"Ask him," said the doctor, shortly; "he can speak for himself—can't you, my lad?"

"Oh, yes, sir. My hands smart a good deal; but how is that man I ran back to get out?"

"You ran back to get him out, my lad?" said the colonel.

"Yes; I kicked against him. He was pinned down by some trestles and a tent-pole," said Dick, speaking in a feverish, excited way. "Do tell me how he is."

"Rather bad yet, so one of my colleagues says," replied the doctor.

The colonel hurried across the room to where two doctors were attending the officer, who was giving them great cause for anxiety, for he had been burned a good deal about one side of the head, and had been so nearly suffocated that a long course of the treatment used for the apparently drowned had been necessary before he began to breathe regularly again.

The colonel stood by the improvised couch for some minutes before some words uttered by the doctor in attendance relieved him sufficiently to enable him to return to help the members of his mess and allay the sufferings and anxieties of the guests.

"He's better," he said, pausing for a few moments beside the regimental surgeon, who was still tending Dick. "By the way, come and see to some of the ladies now."

"While I am bandaging this poor fellow, and while I am expecting fresh cases every moment?"

"No—no, there are no more; the canvas has all been drawn away, and the place carefully explored."

"Very well; I'll come as soon as I can. You'll have plenty of civilian doctors to see to them."

"Colonel!" cried Dick, sharply.

"Will you be quiet, sir?" cried the surgeon.—"Don't take any notice; he's a little light-headed!"

"No, I'm not!" said Dick, angrily. "I know what I'm saying.—Colonel!"

"What is it, my lad?"

"Is Lieutenant Lacey much hurt?"

"No, scarcely at all."

"And the lady?"

"Do you want to be very bad, sir?" cried the doctor. "Hold your tongue!"

"Yes, doctor, directly; but I want to know, colonel!"

"Yes, yes, my lad," said the old officer, laying his hand upon the youth's arm.

"Tell me about the lady."

"She has come to her senses; not burned, only terribly alarmed. She will be able to thank you for your bravery!"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Dick, hurriedly, and with a singular abstention in his semi-delirium from the use of the title of respect—*sir*; "anyone would have done the same. Now tell me about the poor fellow over yonder."

"I forbid you to ask another question!" cried the doctor, angrily.

"Let him hear what he wants, and then I'll go," said the colonel, quietly. "What do you want to know, my lad?"

"Who is it? Which of the gentlemen of the mess?"

"Neither," said the colonel, quietly. "It is one of our guests—Lieutenant Sir Mark Frayne."

Dick's jaw dropped, and his eyes dilated widely, as the colonel now walked sharply away.

Chapter Thirty.

The Echo of the Ball.

The barrack yard was thronged as the colonel hurried out, thankful that the terrible disaster had not been made awful by any loss of life; and for the next hour he was one of the most active in trying to allay the alarm, and soothing the frightened girls and their chaperones, who were now the occupants of the quarters where the various officers' wives were doing their best to play hostess to the torn and dishevelled beings who had sought shelter beneath their roof.

As for the square in which the marquee had been erected, that remained a perfect chaos till the morning, the colonel having given orders that nothing should be touched as soon as the fire had been extinguished and the escaping gas securely stopped where the great pipe—not the original cause of the mischief, but that which had been broken by the explosion—stood amongst a heap of charred relics of the supper; while, to insure that such articles of jewellery as had been lost in the terrible struggle should be in safety, sentries were posted, and soon after the barrack yard was cleared of all save those who had special business there.

Hours elapsed before the last carriage rolled away with its scared occupants; for in the cases of those who had come from a distance the servants had not been ordered to attend till two and three o'clock.

At last, though, there was peace, and the officers of the 205th gathered in the mess-room to partake of a cup of coffee and a cigar before seeking their beds, as, utterly fagged out, they sat for some time talking over the events of the evening.

"Well, gentlemen," said the colonel, at last, "I hope you are satisfied with our ball."

"Satisfied!" cried the major. "Sir, I should like to court-martial the scoundrel who left that gas escaping!"

"Humph! Yes; but not a military offence," said the colonel. "Well, doctor, you've been growing horribly rusty lately; this ought to make you work easily and well!"

"Not my style," said the doctor. "Hysterical, frightened women and singed dandies not my class of work! A good respectable gunshot wound, a leg off, or a bayonet probe, if you like; but

this sort of thing—bah! Why, if it had not been for our flute-player and Sir Mark Frayne, I should have been nowhere!”

“But where’s Lacey?” said one of the officers.

“Ah, where’s Adonis?” cried another.

“Poor old chap, he looked more like a chimney-sweep when he was pulled out!”

“Yes, it was a narrow squeak for him; but I have not seen him since he came to.”

“Had a bath and gone to bed,” said one of the subalterns; “and I feel as if it would do me good.”

“He was a bit scorched, one of the town doctors said.”

“Here, who is waiting?” cried the colonel.

One of the servants appeared, with half-washed face, but clean hands, and a moustache burned to a stubble.

“Go and see if Lieutenant Lacey’s man is there, and send him up to his master’s quarters. Let him say that I shall be glad to know how he is; but he is not to be disturbed if he is asleep.”

“Beg pardon, sir; not asleep.”

“How do you know?” said the colonel, sharply.

“I am Mr Lacey’s servant, sir. He went home with two ladies, sir, about two o’clock, sir, and hasn’t come back.”

“Then he can’t be very bad!”

“Yes, he can!” said a deep voice, and the gentleman in question marched up the room—blackened, with his hair scorched from the side of his head, and one arm in a sling formed of a lady’s silk scarf. “I’m horribly bad! For goodness’ sake, give me a drink!”

Almost as he uttered the words, Jerry handed him a frothing glass of brandy and soda, which he had hurried out to prepare as soon as he saw his master’s exhausted state.

“Hah!” ejaculated Lacey, as he set down the glass and then sank into an easy-chair.

"Your arm bad?" said the colonel, anxiously. Then to the doctor—"Will you see to him?"

"Yes, of course," said that gentleman, who was on the alert directly. "Come with me to your room, Lacey, my boy, and let's have a look at you."

"Not if I know it!" said the young officer, with an energy that startled his hearers. "I'll prescribe for myself—Rest! Here, who's got a good cigar?"

Half a dozen were outstretched directly.

"I said *a* cigar!" growled Lacey. "I haven't got six mouths! Hi, Brigley, a light!"

But Jerry had left the room, and matches were offered by the nearest neighbour.

"That fellow's always out of the way when I want him!" snarled Lacey, savagely, as he struck a match, which went off with a loud crack, and lit his cigar, at which he began to puff furiously.

"Your injuries are paining you, my dear Lacey."

"So would yours, if you had them!" cried the young man with a snap; and the colonel smiled. "I don't see where the fun comes in, sir!" growled Lacey, angrily.

"I beg your pardon, my dear fellow," cried his chief. "I really sympathise with you, though."

"Try another way, sir," said Lacey, looking round with his eyes rolling, and then he sat, smoked, and sipped in silence.

"See your ladies home safely?" said the colonel at last.

"Oh, yes, sir; I saw them home safely," cried the lieutenant, snatching his cigar from his lips and dashing it into the empty grate. "Colonel, did you ever have an old woman in hysterics on your hands?"

"Well, I have had ladies in hysterics on my hands."

"But not for an hour and a half! Oh, it was awful, and all the time someone else so ill she could hardly stir. By George, what a scene! I don't care. You fellows sneer at me, and say I don't know anything about women: but I do. Old maids who have

hysterics are the most selfish wretches that ever breathed. I couldn't get away."

"Of course not," said one of the officers. "That's your fault."

"My fault! Why?"

"Being so good-looking!"

"Good-looking! Ha! ha! ha! Look at me!" cried Lacey, leaping up and surveying his scorched face, and then his blackened uniform and general aspect of having been badly in the wars. "Yes, I look handsome, don't I? I say, though, I thought it was all over with me. I couldn't get free. Who helped me out?"

"That plucky little bandsman!"

"Not Smithson?" cried the lieutenant.

"Yes, Smithson," said the colonel.

"God bless him!" cried the lieutenant in a low voice full of emotion.

"Amen!" said the colonel. "He saved the lives of that sweet girl—Miss Deane, yours, and then Sir Mark Frayne's."

Lacey began to move towards the door; and the doctor rose, gave the colonel a significant nod, and followed.

"Going, Lacey?" said the colonel kindly.

"Yes, sir. I'm going to see and thank that brave lad."

"No, no; not to-night—I mean this morning," said the doctor. For the grey light was stealing in, and making the tall, blackened figure of the lieutenant look ghastly.

"Why not?"

"Because," said the doctor, "the poor fellow is in such a state that I cannot answer for his life."

"Then I'll go and sit by him till he's better!" said the lieutenant, resolutely.

The colonel followed him to the door, and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Lacey, my boy," he half-whispered, "take the doctor's advice and mine—you are not yourself now."

"He saved our lives, sir," said the young officer. "One can't do too much for a man like that."

"No, my dear boy, one cannot; but you heard you are better away."

Lacey looked at him inquiringly.

"You'll oblige me by not going," said the colonel quickly, "and as much by going to your room and letting Lester see to you a bit."

"You wish it, colonel?"

"I do, Lacey."

"Will you come up with me to my quarters, Lester?" said the young man, quietly.

"Of course, my dear boy—of course," said the doctor, and they went out together, to be closely followed by Jerry, who reached the staircase first, and sprung up to light candles, though they were hardly necessary then.

"Why, colonel, he was like a lamb with you," said the major. "Who'd have thought it of Adonis!"

"Yes, he was like a lamb with me, and I always thought it of him," said the colonel, quietly. "We all laugh at and chaff him, but I should not like to be the man who had done him a wrong."

"Nor the fellow who had tried to bayonet him when his blood was up?"

"No," said the colonel quickly. "Now, gentlemen, bed for me. I don't think this old town will ever forget our ball."

He nodded, and left the mess-room, to go across the yard.

"Why, that's not the way to his quarters," said one of the officers, as he followed his chief with his eyes toward the shadowy building in which a faint light or two could be seen burning.

"No," said another. "I know: he's gone across to the infirmary."

"Is Frayne there?"

"No," said the major, "he's at Lindon's quarters. Chief's gone to see how little Smithson is. Let's—no, we'll drink his health after dinner this evening. Gentlemen, I'm for bed, or the sun will be up first."

Ten minutes later the mess-room looked grey and dismal—a pitiful contrast to its appearance a few hours before, but the sun rose before long as bright and glorious as ever, to come in at the infirmary window upon Dick Smithson's scorched brow, while, in company with the hospital attendant, the fat sergeant sat watching with a careworn expression upon his broad, good-humoured face.

"What did he say?" whispered the attendant, after Dick had hurriedly babbled a few words.

"Marks," said the sergeant; "Marks—he's thinking about the scars that there'll be upon his face."

Chapter Thirty One.

Down in the Dumps.

It was in the hospital by the invalid's side.

"Don't you look like that!" said Jerry. "I know how it is! You're getting better, and are able to think more. When you were ten times as bad, you never used to look so down and say you would never get right again!"

Jerry looked at Brumpton as he delivered himself of this oracular speech, and the fat sergeant declared that he was right; but Dick did not believe either of them.

"I've got some news for you, too."

"Look here," said Brumpton. "I must be off. Stop with him as long as you can, Jerry Brigley.—I say, why don't you have your flute, and practise a bit?"

Dick looked up from the easy-chair in which he lay back, and his eyes brightened; but they turned dull again, and he shook his head.

As soon as the sergeant had gone, Dick spoke.

"What is your news?" he said, feebly.

"Shan't tell you, if you don't pluck up a bit! You ought to be well by now. Why, it is a whole blessed month since that unlucky night, and here have you been bad ever since with burning and fever; and it's been a wonder to me as nobody understood what you were talking about. You let the cat out of the bag lots of times, but I was the only one as understood the connundrum."

"Tell me your news," said Dick, wearily.

Jerry picked up a bouquet standing in water, sniffed it, and set it down again, watching the patient furtively as he went on ignoring the question.

"Here was Mr Lacey knocked up for a few days after his singeing, and gets right again, though his head of 'air is still orful to be'old; and it's on'y by cutting the other side so short as to make something like a match to the singed-off side where he was burnt that I made him able to go out when he got better. Soldiers do wear their hair pretty close, but his head looked quite indecent; and, as for his starshers, they're like a bit o' black toothbrush worn stumpy."

"You said that you had some news," said Dick, angrily.

"And then there's him as ought to ha' been the worst of all you three. He got burnt a deal, but it was mostly about the clothes. The padding in his uniform seemed to save him. I say—what are you going to do with yourself to-day?"

"Nothing."

"Let me give you a shampoo and a touch up."

Dick shook his head impatiently, and lay back, a shadow of his former self.

"You'd better!"

"Don't worry me, Jerry! You said you had some news."

"It's a letter," said the man, looking at him curiously.

"A letter?" cried Dick, starting; but the interest he took was only momentary, and his eyes half-closed again.

"Yes, a letter. I've had it two days, and didn't like to give it to you before."

"Why not?"

Jerry took a note from his breast, and held it so that the invalid could see first that it was not addressed, the envelope being blank; and then, slowly turning it round, so that Dick could see a crest stamped in colours upon the back.

That had its effect, for a flush came into the invalid's hollow cheeks, and he glared at Jerry.

"Where did you get that?" he cried.

"He give it me."

"Well?"

"To give to you. I see him the day before yesterday, and he told me to come to his rooms, and asked me about the bandsman whom the fellows said saved three people, and what your name might be. Then he asked if it was you who pulled him out, and I said it was, feeling quite queer the while; for it seemed so strange that you should have saved his life after all as took place. Then he set down at his table, looking not a bit the worse, asked how you spell your name, and I told him Richard Smithson, and he wrote this and sent it by me."

"Do you know what's in it?"

Jerry nodded.

"Then he recognised me?"

"No—he don't even know that he ever see you."

"But he seemed to know me at the ball."

"Oh, no! he didn't know you. He thinks you're dead as dead."

"But you say you know what is in that note?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You've read it?"

"Not that."

"What do you mean?"

Jerry took a closely-folded newspaper from his pocket.

"*Ratcham, Dolchester, and Froude Magnet*, sir—Richard Smithson," he read, and then doubling it closely, held it out, pointing to a paragraph.

"My eyes swim. I don't understand what you mean, Jerry."

"Shall I read it, sir?"

"Yes."

Jerry coughed and then began:—

"The Late Fire at the Barracks.—We understand that Lieutenant Sir Mark Frayne, of the 310th, has presented Smithson, the gallant young bandsman of the 205th Fusiliers, with a handsome cheque as a memento of his prowess during the catastrophe after the military ball was nearly over. Smithson, we are glad to say, is convalescent."

Dick's eyes contracted, and he stared hard at Jerry.

"That's the way some folks do it. That's what they call advertising. Proper way. Never give anything till people's looking on, and if they won't see, put it in the paper, and then they'll read."

"Open that envelope," said Dick, sharply, and Jerry obeyed, taking out slowly a sheet of paper, from which fell a cheque.

"Shall I read, sir?" asked Jerry.

"Yes," said Dick, in a more decisive way than he had displayed since the night of the ball.

"'With Sir Mark Frayne's best wishes to the brave soldier who saved his life.' Sounds handsome, don't it? 'Messrs Roots and Company, pay Richard Smithson, or order, Five Pounds.'"

Jerry glanced at Dick, who lay back now, with his eyes closed, looking very stern.

"It's too much," said Jerry. "Five pound! Fippence is about all his life's worth?"

"Have you a box of matches?"

"Yes; want a smoke, sir?"

"Light a match."

Jerry obeyed, struck a light, and held the cheque in one hand, the wax taper in the other.

"Burn it," said Dick, shortly.

"It's fi' pounds, sir; and you may want it."

"Burn it!" cried Dick, sternly.

"Well, it's your own, and you've a right to do as you like with it," said Jerry; and the thin scrap of paper was held to the flame, burned till the man's fingers were in danger, and then fell slowly to the floor as so much tinder.

"That was your news, then?"

"Not all of it."

"What is it, then?"

Jerry picked up the bunch of flowers, sniffed at it, and set it down again in the water.

"She's a-coming."

"What?"

"That Miss Deane as sent these is coming in with Mr Lacey this afternoon."

Dick rose up in his chair, staring excitedly.

"She wanted to come ever so long ago, Mr Lacey said, and now he is going to bring her. Hadn't you better let me give you a shampoo, sir?"

"Miss Deane coming here with the lieutenant—to this wretched place?"

"Well, she ain't coming to see the place; she's a-coming to see you."

"No, no, Jerry! Go and tell Mr Lacey she mustn't come."

"Likely! Now just look here. You want to keep all about yourself quiet, and sits upon me when I says go to the colonel and out with it all, like a man—now don't you?"

"Yes, yes. I'll wait my time," said Dick; and he added, softly, "If I live."

"And then, as soon as things are a bit different to what you like, back you goes to the old style, and begins giving your orders. Now just fancy me going to the guvnor's quarters and saying to him, 'Hi! you, sir, you're not to bring Miss Deane to the horspittle to-day.'

"'Who says so?' says he.

"'Dick Smithson, Esquire.'

"And then he says, 'You go and tell Dick Smithson he's a common soldier, and if he ever dares to send me such a message as that again, I'll report him to the colonel for insubordination'—that's the word, sir, 'insubordination.' I've picked up a deal since I've been in the army; and, as we used to learn at school—and precious little it was!—'positive insolence; comparytive, insubordination: s'perlative mutiny.'"

"Yes, Jerry, you're right; I forget myself sometimes," sighed Dick.

"Sometimes! Why, you've forgot yourself altogether. Come now, let me give you a spick up, and make you look a little more like old times. Now then, just a little shampoo."

"No, no."

"And the scissors put round your 'air a bit. Shave wouldn't hurt you neither."

"I wish you wouldn't worry me, Jerry."

"I won't worry you; only you can't see a lady as you are, you know—Don't want to—keep your eyes shut, please—to see you a bit o' dandy, like Mr Lacey. Feel nice and cool, eh?"

Dick nodded, and suffered Jerry to place his hands on each side of the basin of water planted upon his knees, so as to keep it steady.

"Nothing like a soft sponge, cold water, and a bit o' scented soap—those are Mr Lacey's—to comfort you up. Of course, it depends on the oppyrator. I've seen women soaping little kids and making 'em squirm and yell, when I've felt as I could ha' washed the poor little things and made 'em laugh all the time.—This is one of Mr Lacey's towels, too—he wouldn't mind me bringing 'em. I say, though, you are a deal better. Fortni't ago you'd have shrunk like if I'd touched you even as tender as that."

"What's that—pomatum?"

"Pomatum! As if I'd use pomatum to a gent's 'air or a private's either. No, that's a cream made from a prescription I gave a 'airdresser half a soverin' for. Violets is nothing to it in the way o' smell. I won't quite shampoo you to-day, but give you just an extra brush. You want freshening—that's all—and I don't want you to be tired. Have a shave?"

"No, no; there's nothing to shave."

"Nothing! call that nothing? Why, I've known gents to go and be shaved reg'lar with not half your beard. Well, I'll let you off for another day or two but I must touch up those finger-nails."

Dick made a gesture, but it was all in vain. Almost before he knew it, Jerry had laid aside towel, brushes, and basin, and begun upon the nails, which he trimmed with wonderful dexterity, commenting the while on things in general.

"Look here," he said: "if you want to keep things quiet, you'd better wear your hands in your pockets. Nobody as knows anything would believe your name's Smithson, if he sees your hands."

"Why?" said Dick, who felt half-amused.

"'Cause there's so much breed about your nails. 'Gift on the finger's sure to linger; gift on the thumb is sure to come.' Do you know he calls and sees Miss Deane and her aunt?"

"Mr Lacey?—of course."

"I didn't mean him. Lookers-on see most of the game. Wonder what Mr Lacey would say if I was to tell him all I know."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, sir. I dunno what he'd say; but I think I know what he'd do—scrunch Mr Mark like a walnut in a door-hinge!"

"Look here, I don't want to hear any scandal, Jerry. There, that will do! I'll give you a shilling as soon as I have one."

"Thank ye; but don't. Keep it saved up for me, till I can say *sir* to you proper. When are you going to begin?"

The coming of the hospital attendant with Dick's dinner interrupted the conversation; and that afternoon, as he sat by the open window, with the bouquet of flowers before him and a book, there was a rustling of silk on the stairs—loud, heavy steps, quiet and light steps as well—and directly after the door was opened, and Lacey, looking proud and happy, ushered Miss Deane into the room.

Chapter Thirty Two.

A startling Fact.

That event was the turning-point in Dick Smithson's long illness; and the words said to him by Anna Deane at her visit convinced him that there was something worth living for, even if it was only to have won the respect and friendship of the lady whom he judged now to be the lieutenant's betrothed.

"I knew it," Jerry said, with a good, open smile, as he was finishing Dick's toilet. "Nobody knows till they try it what virtue there is in a shampoo."

That was some few days later, when the lieutenant's servant had gone to the hospital, as usual, to see how the patient was getting on, and if anything could be done.

"Rubbish!" cried Dick, who was still very weak; but there was a different look in his eyes now that was cheering, and it made Jerry rub his hands.

"All right; you call it rubbish. That's the way of the world. Chap's dying; doctor gives him the right stuff, and pulls him round; and he says: 'Physic? Rubbish! I should have got right by myself.'"

"I wasn't talking about doctors," said Dick, "but of you and your shampooing."

"All right, have it your own way; but you began to get better the morning after the gov'nor brought Miss Deane, and since I shampooed you."

"Absurd!" cried Dick.

"That's right, stick to it; but I say that when a man's weak and upset, if he has a good shampoo—I mean a real shampoo, given by anyone who understands it—he begins to feel better directly. There, it stands to reason. Even a watch won't go without it's properly cleaned now and then; so how can you expect it of a human being? But never mind, sir, you are better, and that's everything. Mind my coming up?"

"Mind? No; I'm glad to see you, Jerry. How is Mr Lacey?"

"Well, I wanted to talk to you about him, sir."

"Not going back, surely?" said Dick, eagerly.

"Well, he is and he isn't, if you can understand that."

"But has the doctor seen him?"

"Wouldn't do no good, if he did, sir. Sort of complaint no doctor couldn't cure."

"Now, look here, Jerry; do you see that glass of lemonade?"

"See it? Of course."

"Then take warning: if you begin telling me that nothing will do Mr Lacey any good but a shampoo, I'll throw it at you."

Jerry grinned.

"You are getting better, Dick Smithson, and no mistake," he said; "but you can drink the stuff, for you won't have to throw it at me, because shampooing ain't no good for a bit o' gambling—whether it's horse-racing or cards."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, this, S'Rich—"

"Hush!"

Slap!

Jerry gave himself a heavy pat on the mouth.

"Forgot," he muttered. "Look here, sir—I mean Dick Smithson—has Mr Lacey got plenty of money?"

"I don't know. He must be pretty well-off or he couldn't live as he does."

"Oh, I don't see that. Lots o' gentry lives in good style and no money per rannum, as we calls it, at all. But you think he is pretty well-off?"

"Yes; why are you talking like this?"

"Because he ought to be stopped, or somebody else ought."

"I don't understand you, Jerry. Speak out openly, please."

"Oh, very well, then, I will, even if it costs me my place. You see, I've burnt my fingers, so that I know," and these words came fast. "I can't help seeing when anyone's getting into the fire."

"Do you mean, in plain English, Jerry, that Mr Lacey is betting and gambling?"

"That's just what I do mean, in plain English."

"But it seems impossible, situated as he is."

"With a hangel to take care of him? It do."

"He never seemed to me to be a man who would care for such things."

"More he would if he wasn't led on to it. It is his doing—him, I mean!"

"My cousin?"

"That's him; and I'm beginning to think you ought to do something as soon as you're well enough. Speak up, and say who you are and why you're here."

"They'd call me an impostor, Jerry."

"What, when you've got me for a witness? Not they, sir; I can prove anything. You ought to do something. You ought indeed."

"Must get well first, Jerry."

"Of course, no one can't be expected to do much when he's weak as you are. But as soon as you feel strong enough, do pray make a start; and, just look here, it's your dooty—it is, indeed. If you don't, him as has shown himself your friend 'll be suffering for it, and if he does, so will somebody else."

"Let me get well," said Dick, knitting his brows.

"Well, I will; but, look here, if you don't, my conscience won't let me hold my tongue no longer; I shall speak out myself."

"You wouldn't dare, Jerry, after your promise."

The doctor's visit brought Jerry's to an end, and at last Dick was left alone to think out his position and what he ought to do.

But he could not plan just then; he was too weak, and his head grew confused.

"It will have to wait," he said with a sigh. "Everything in the past seems now like part of a dream, and I'm beginning to feel as if I really am Dick Smithson, and that I have no right to think anything about Mark. Yes, my head feels all wrong, and as if that weary time was coming back. What did the doctor say—that I must sleep all I can? I will."

His eyelids were already drooping from sheer weariness, and a few minutes later he was lying back fast asleep, with nature working steadily and well to build up his strength.

Chapter Thirty Three.

The Missing Man.

Jerry Brigley was operating upon his master's head, a few days later, with a couple of hair-brushes, and these he used in the most dexterous manner; and the results were wonderfully different from those produced by the people who brushed one's boyish hair in the good old times.

"Oh! for the days when I was young!" people cry, and they may well make use of that interjection; but it ought to be in something else than regret.

I, for one, would prefer not to be young again, to go through all that suffering connected with my head.

Pray, do not imagine that I refer to learning the three "R's" or to working out those angular puzzles invented by Euclid, whose problems would only stop in my brain one at a time—that is to say, when I had mastered one perfectly, and could repeat and illustrate it throughout upon slate with pencil, upon paper with pen, upon blackboard with chalk, the process of acquiring another made a clean sweep of the first, which was utterly demolished and had to be relearned, only in its turn to destroy "Proposition Two."

I meant nothing of that sort, but rather the external suffering that my unfortunate little head received at the hands of nurses, who half-suffocated me with the soap that produced temporary blindness in my eyes, and deafness in my ears, before the best family yellow or mottled was "slooshed" away, leaving me panting and hot. Then came the tremendous rubbing, followed by the jiggling out of knots of hair with a cruel comb and the brushing which seemed to make numberless little holes in my tender scalp; while my head was knocked to this side and to that, and then tapped with the back of the brush, because I was a naughty boy and would not hold still.

Lieutenant Lacey's treatment at the hands of Jerry Brigley was of a very different type. When he was shampooing, Jerry could have given Cinquevalli, the great juggler, long odds and beaten him. This man performs wonderful feats with cannon-balls, but they are nothing to Jerry's graceful acts with the human head, which he would take in hand and keep in a perfect state of equilibrium, balancing the pressure of one set of fingers by the resistance of the other; the same when towelling, and, above all, when finishing with a pair of the lieutenant's ivory-backed brushes. His master's head was kept floating, as it were, on the points of the bristles, while a pleasant stimulation was kept up on what Jerry termed "the scallup."

"By the way, Brigley," said the lieutenant, who sat back in his chair, with his eyes half-shut, "I shall have three or four friends here to-night."

"Yes, sir."

"See that the refreshments are on a side-table."

"Yes, sir."

"And go down into the town and buy three or four packs of cards."

"Yes, sir."

Silence for a few moments, and then the lieutenant began again, just as Jerry had come to the conclusion that he could name the guests expected, one of whom was certain to be Mark Frayne.

"And he won't be very glad to see me here," thought Jerry, who started at his master's next words.

"What have you done with your tongue?"

"Beg pardon, sir? Nothing, sir."

"Because you don't talk. Aren't you well?"

"Well, sir? No, sir; not quite, sir."

"Take some pills!" growled Lacey.

"Pills, sir? I 'ate pills!"

"More stupid you. Swallow them at once!"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"I say, swallow them at once. Best way is to wrap them in cigarette-paper."

"Beg pardon, sir! A mistake, sir. I said I 'ate pills."

"I heard you."

Jerry peered round a little into the lieutenant's face, to see if he were trying to make a joke; but Lacey looked serious enough, and the man went on, confidentially—

"Fact is, sir, I'm a bit upset."

"Look sharp and get right again. Don't you say you're too poorly to wait on us to-night!"

"Oh, dear, no, sir! I shall attend upon you; but, the fact is, I'm in trouble."

"Humph! And you want an advance upon your wages. How much?"

"No, sir," said Jerry, irritably, as he drove the bristles of one brush among the bristles of the other; "it's not that sort of trouble. It's about someone."

"Lady! Why, Brigley, you're not thinking of getting married?"

"Oh, no, sir! it's about—about a gent—I mean a man, sir. It's him as you know, sir—Smithson."

"Dick Smithson!" cried the lieutenant. "What's the matter with him?"

"He ain't been the same, sir, since the night of the ball. He has worried me a deal."

"Yes, he seems a good deal pulled down, poor fellow! But is he ill again?"

"No, sir; he went out yesterday—had a pass—and—"

"And what? Don't hesitate like that, man!"

"He did not come back last night."

"Sorry to hear it," said the lieutenant. "Means trouble—punishment. I liked Smithson."

"Yes, sir; everyone did."

"Perhaps he's taken ill, and had to stay somewhere."

Jerry was silent.

"You don't think he has bolted?"

Jerry made no answer, and the lieutenant swung round in his chair.

"Why, you do," he cried, excitedly. "Do you know that bolting means desertion, sir?"

"Yes, sir," said Jerry, humbly.

"Then you're a fool, Brigley."

"Yes, sir."

"If Smithson had been a common sort of pothouse-haunting fellow, it might have been so; but Smithson was a clever musician, and too much of a gentleman to do such a thing."

"Thank ye, sir."

"Thank ye!" cried the lieutenant, irritably; "what do you mean by that?"

"I mean, sir, that's what he is."

"Oh, pooh! he has not deserted."

"I don't know, sir," said Jerry, dubiously.

"Look here, Brigley: I don't often use bad language, but if you talk like that, confound you! I shall swear at you."

"I wish you would, sir," said Jerry.

"What?"

"I say I wish you would, sir. It would seem to do me good like, for I'm reg'larly upset about Smithson, sir."

"There, I beg your pardon, Brigley. I'm sorry I spoke so roughly."

"Oh, don't do that, sir. It don't matter. I don't want to think he's gone, sir, because it's 'ard—because he seemed to trust me a bit, and I don't like for him to have gone off without saying a word."

"Look here: you knew him before he joined?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I knew him."

"You were friends?"

"No, sir—not exactly friends, but I knew him."

"And—There! I don't want to pump you, Brigley, but I suppose he was in quite a different station of life, and got into some trouble, which made him leave home?"

"Beg pardon, sir; Dick Smithson made me swear as I'd keep my mouth shut about him, and I give him my word; and, all respect to you, sir, I'm going to keep it; but I can't contradict what you said, sir, all the same."

"Well, it would be confoundedly ungentlemanly of me to be prying into anyone's affairs, Brigley, and I won't ask questions about him. I hope, though, he hasn't done anything so foolish as to desert, because, even if he is in the band, he is a soldier, and—I have heard nothing. Has it been reported?"

"Yes, sir; and Mr Wilkins is making a big stir about it. Never had a civil word for him, and used to sneer at his playing; but, now Dick's gone, he's going on as if he couldn't spare him at no price."

"How do you know—who told you?"

"The bombardon, sir."

"The what? Why don't you say the big drum?"

"Beg pardon, sir, I meant Sergeant Brumpton, the fa—stout musician, sir, as is practising for the band."

"Then they must be sending out notices to the police all over the place. Tut—tut—tut! This is a great pity. I must ask you one thing, Brigley: has there anything happened that would make him likely to go?"

Jerry nodded his head over and over again.

"I'm sorry—very sorry; but perhaps we are making a stir about nothing, and he'll be back soon."

"Yes, sir, perhaps he will."

"But you don't expect to see him, eh?"

Jerry shook his head—this time violently—and no more was said, for the lieutenant had to finish dressing and go on parade.

A couple of hours later the young bandsman's disappearance was the talk of the barracks, and numerous were the reasons assigned for it; while the customary notification was given, to the annoyance of Dick's friends and the gratification of his enemies, these consisting of the men who wished to be on good terms with the bandmaster.

But Jerry had his business to attend to; for, though Lieutenant Lacey was annoyed, he had invited friends for that evening, and the orders given had to be attended to. So the man went off into the town and bought the playing-cards, shaking his head as he walked back. "Don't seem much now for a pack of cards," he muttered, "but I'll be bound to say they'll cost the gov'nor a pretty penny. Wonder what he'd say to me if I told him the best thing he could do would be never to make another bet and never to touch a card again. I know—he'd kick me."

"Who would?" said someone at his elbow.

"Hallo! You! Mr Brumpton? Was I talking aloud?"

"Yes, quite aloud."

"Then it's a bad habit, sir. I say, has young Smithson come back?"

"No; I'm afraid he's gone, Brigley. There always was a bit of mystery about that young fellow. You had no idea that he was going off?"

"Not I, or I should have let out at him. I say, they won't call it desertion, will they, Mr Brumpton?"

"That's what they do call it; and, the worst of it is, he'll be punished."

"Won't the colonel let him off easy as—as he's a musician?"

"How can they let him off easy? Why, if they did, half the roughs of the regiment would be off at once."

"Ah! I didn't think of that," said Jerry, sadly. "But s'pose he comes back of himself?"

"He'll be punished, but not so severely."

"And s'pose he don't come back?"

"Don't suppose any confounded nonsense," said the fat sergeant, wiping his moist forehead. "I'd have given anything—sooner than it should have happened. There's that twopenny-fife of a man, Wilkins, squeaking about it all over the place. Hang him! I should like to punch his miserable little head, only my hands are so fat they'd feel like boxing-gloves to him. What do you think he said just now?"

"As he was glad Smithson had gone?"

"No; I'd have believed him for that. He never liked the lad, and it would only have been the honest truth. He said that it was a painful thing; but, under the circumstances, he should advise every man to examine his kit, and see that his instruments were all right."

"What did he mean by that?" cried Jerry.

"Mean! Why, for the men to see that the poor lad hadn't carried off anything that didn't belong to him."

"Well!" cried Jerry, fiercely, "of all! Here! I can't stand that!"

"Hold hard!" cried the fat sergeant, catching his arm. "Where are you going?"

"To the bandmaster," cried Jerry, "to have it out with him. My hands won't feel like gloves!"

"Stop where you are!" growled the sergeant. "Never mind Wilkins. You don't want to get in a row. Do you want to strike your officer?"

"Officer!" cried Jerry, excitedly; "officer! I don't call that combination of a thing an officer!"

"You be quiet," said Brumpton. "We've said enough as it is."

"No, sir, we ain't! and, soldier or no soldier, I'm a man, and not going to have things like that spoken about my comrade—and such a comrade as him!"

"Be quiet, I tell you!" said Brumpton; and the man's tone and manner made Jerry forget that he was so pincushion-like in appearance. "I don't want you to get in trouble, too!"

"And I don't want to get in trouble," said Jerry; "but I don't call it manly for a lot of fellows who knew Dick Smithson to be a reg'lar gent to the backbone to stand there and hear that mean little wax-match of a man, without saying a word or sticking up for him!"

"Who said nobody stuck up for him?" said Brumpton.

"You never said anyone did!"

"Well, they did!" said Brumpton.

"Oh, that's better! What did they say?"

"As soon as he spoke like that, a lot of the men began to hiss."

"Hiss!" cried Jerry, contemptuously; "why, a goose on Clapham Common could do that!"

"And then," continued Brumpton, "Wilkins began to blink over his music-stand, looking as red in the face as his uniform. 'Who was that?' he says—'who was it that dared to make that noise?'"

"And then no one spoke," sneered Jerry. "Hissed! I'd ha' punched his head. Bandmaster, indeed!—I'd ha' been the bandmaster's master that time!"

"Wrong, Jerry Brigley!" cried Brumpton. "Someone did speak, others did not; but I'll answer for everyone, I spoke out."

"Bravo!" cried Jerry. "What did you say, sergeant?"

"I said it was a blackguardly, cowardly thing to say behind a man's back."

"Yes; and what then?" cried Jerry, breathlessly.

"Then? Oh, he turned upon me and let me have it, while I took no notice, feeling as I did that I ought to have known better; and the quieter I was the more he went on giving it me, and threatening and getting more and more savage, till he roused me at last."

"How? What did he say?"

"Well, there is one thing that makes me wild, and he did it. I stood there holding the bombardon, letting him go on, till all at

once he told me that I was no more good in my company and I had come sneaking to the band to try and get taken on there, but that I was of no use at all, and he'd soon put a stop to my practising with the men; and that I was—"

Brumpton stopped, and wiped his face again.

"Well, let's have it!" cried Jerry, excitedly.

"He said that I was a fat, idiotic porpoise; and that did it."

"Did what?" cried Jerry.

"I'd got that big bombardon upside down in my hands, and, before I knew it, I'd brought it down on his bald head, just as if it was an extinguisher."

"And put him out!" said Jerry.

"Well, he put me out then, anyhow."

"And what did he say, then."

"Oh, he didn't say any more," replied Brumpton. "But I'm sorry I did it, and there'll be a big row."

"Mind shaking hands with me, sergeant?"

"No, my lad—not a bit."

"Hah!" ejaculated Jerry after the operation. "That was a real honest English grip, and I wish Dick Smithson had been there to hear you take his part. He'll never come back now!"

"He will," said the sergeant, drily.

"Not he. Never show his face here again."

"No! We will show it for him, poor lad. Ah! it was a very mad thing to do; and, if the truth was known, not the first mad thing Smithson's done."

"Right," said Jerry.

"Look here, Jerry Brigley, you haven't been a soldier long enough to know how sharp the police are in tracking deserters. It don't take very long to send word all over the country that a man—described—has left his regiment."

"I dunno so much about that," said Jerry.

"Well, I do!" replied Brumpton. "Say the police here telegraph to twenty stations round, and each of those twenty stations wire to twenty, and each of those to another twenty, it don't take long, at that rate, to send all over the country. You mark my words: the bobbies won't be long before they put their hands on his shoulder and bring him back."

"Just as if he had stole something!" groaned Jerry.

"So he has," said the sergeant; "a smart, clever young man; and his clothes and all belonging to the Queen."

"But maybe he'll send the toggery back," pleaded Jerry.

"They don't want the clothes; they want the man!"

Chapter Thirty Four.

"Too late! Too late!"

It was about ten o'clock that evening, after the officers had left the mess-room, that one of the subalterns sauntered up to Lacey's quarters, where he found the latter waiting for his guests.

"Cigarette?" said Lacey.

"Thanks!" replied the young officer.

"Light?" continued Lacey.

"Thanks!" said the guest; and they two sat smoking in silence, for Lacey's thoughts were upon Dick Smithson, and upon the night of the ball and the gallantry which had saved the lives of both him and his betrothed.

They did not wait long, for, before their cigarettes were finished, Mark Frayne knocked at the door, and was admitted by Jerry, who stood back for him to enter, looking very quiet, and then noting that Mark gave a start, but took no further notice of Draycott's old servant, entering the room, to be frankly welcomed.

Five minutes later a brother-officer of Mark arrived, and before long, at the latter's suggestion, the card-table was sought, and the game went on for a couple of hours in a very quiet, natural way.

Then came an interval for refreshments, and a little chat that was far from lively. After this the play was resumed, with Jerry seated in the outer lobby, thinking over the state of affairs.

"She ought to be told of it, and try to stop him," he said to himself. "He's a baby at cards, and that Mark Frayne fleeces him as hard as ever he can. I wish something would happen."

Then he thought of Richard's disappearance, and of how glad Mark would be when he found that his cousin had gone, unless Dick had gone up to town to consult with some lawyer, who might perhaps put him in the way of regaining his rights.

"How could he have been such a young donkey to do as he did?" muttered Jerry; and then, feeling exceedingly drowsy, he refreshed himself with a cup of strong coffee to make him wakeful.

After about another hour he took in some of the hot coffee, and saw that the last new pack of cards had been opened and the wrapper tossed upon the floor; while the players looked hollow-cheeked and pale, too intent upon their game to care for the refreshment, and impatiently bidding him be off.

"It's a bad complaint that men ketches—that gambling," said Jerry; "and when they've got it, they gives it to others, who have it worse. I've no call to talk, for I've been bad enough. How precious white and seedy young Mark looks! Anyone would think he had been up to some game of his own. Every time I opened the door he give quite a jump in his chair, and, though he laughed it off, he's as nervous as nerves. Wants to win, I s'pose."

Jerry had a good long walk up and down the lobby—that is to say, he walked up and down for a long time—and, feeling that he must rest himself for a while, he slowly subsided into a chair, let his head sink back, turned it sideways so as to arrange it comfortably, and then he opened his eyes directly after—as it seemed to him—to find it was daylight. The candles had burned down very low, and two of his master's guests were standing at his side.

"Let us out, my lad," said the elder of the two; and as soon as he had handed them their hats and coats, and closed the door, he gave his eyes a rub.

"I wonder where S'Richard is?" he thought. "Why, I must have been asleep a good two hours. Has young Mark gone?"

He went softly through the outer room, to find the door of the inner one just ajar, and there, at a table, he could see his master writing.

"Young Mark must have let himself out," muttered Jerry. But he altered his opinion directly, for Lacey turned the paper he had written, folded it, and held it up to someone on the other side of the table and invisible from where the man stood.

"There you are!" said Lacey.

"Really, dear boy, I'm almost ashamed to take it. But, there, I'm only acting as your steward. You'll have to come to my quarters and win it all back. The wheel of fortune goes round, eh?"

"Yes," said Lacey, laconically. "Take anything else?"

"No, really—no thanks!" said Mark. "Good-night—morning, or whatever it is. Can I let myself out?"

"The man is there," said Lacey, coldly.

But Jerry did not remain there, to wait just outside, but made his way quickly back into the lobby, where he stood, ready to hand Mark his large Inverness cloak and hat, and then open the door.

"Looks as if he were going to be hanged," muttered Jerry very sourly, as he stood watching the young officer descend in the grey morning light. "Wonder how much he has won, and whether it makes him feel better? I know one thing: it makes me feel a deal worse, and as if I should like to pitch him over the banisters. I 'ate that chap—that's what's the matter with me—and I'd tell him so to his face as soon as look at him, that I would!"

Jerry closed the door and went across the lobby, hearing the heavy pace of his master as he walked restlessly up and down the room.

"The scoundrel!" Lacey muttered. "He is a scoundrel, and I'm a fool—a pigeon, and he has plucked me. I swear he cheated. He played that very trick I was once warned about. Serve me right! But it's the last time."

He continued his hurried pace, growing sterner and more decisive as he walked.

"A lesson to me!" he muttered. "A dishonourable scoundrel! At Miss Deane's, too! I swear he has been trying to oust me, and the old lady has encouraged him. Anna told me of his words to her. One can't call a man out now; and if I spread it abroad about the cards there'll be no end of a row, and he'd be indignant. No, I won't speak. It's a lesson to me for being such an easy-going fool."

He turned thoughtful now, but was ready to look up sharply as Jerry entered.

"Want me any more 'smornin', sir?"

"No, Brigley, no. You have heard no more news of poor Smithson?"

"No, sir, not a word."

"Strange how I have been thinking of him all the night."

"So have I, sir. I went to sleep, too, out in the lobby, and I've just recollected, sir, I was dreaming all about him and wondering where he'd gone."

"Ah, it's a bad business, Brigley. He ought to have known better. But we all do things we are sorry for sometimes and repent of them afterwards. There, be off to bed."

"Shan't I clear up a bit, sir, first?"

"No: that will do."

Jerry went out of the room and shut the door after him—to stand looking back, as if he expected to be able to see through the panels everything that was going on. His brow was wrinkled up, his nostrils twitched, and his ears moved slightly, for he was listening intently; and a looker-on would have seen that he was intensely excited.

For Jerry was thinking about cases he had read of in the papers, and, being somehow naturally prone to fancy people in trouble likely to make away with themselves by jumping into flooded rivers, he now took up the idea that the lieutenant, after a disastrous night of play, had some reason for desiring to get rid of him.

"There's two double centre-fire breech-loaders in the case," he said to himself, "and there's his revolver and his sword, besides that old hunting-knife in the shark's-skin case—there's every temptation for a young man to do it. Oh, what a world this is! Why, that there Mark Frayne's been the cause of all the trouble, and driven S'Richard away—blow him!—Dick Smithson. I won't think of him by that name. But if I went and did good to everybody by knocking Master Mark on the head, or holding him under water till he was full and wouldn't go any more, they'd try me for it, and then—Never mind: I won't think what. I haven't patience with such laws."

Jerry stood listening, but all was very silent inside, and he grew more uneasy.

"I won't go," he said to himself. "He means something, or he wouldn't have been in such a jolly hurry to get rid of me. Phew! how hot it is turned, and my hands and feet are like ice."

He wiped his damp forehead, and stood gazing at the door, shaking his head mournfully, and with the dread of something wrong on the increase. But all was still, and even that Jerry looked upon as a bad omen.

"I know," he muttered. "He has been and lost all his tin, and he's making his will; and I don't want him to, even if he's going to leave me that horse-shoe pin with diamonds in for nails. Here! I can't stand this—I'll go in!"

Jerry hesitated for a few minutes, and then, unable to control the intense desire to see what was going on, he was about to take hold of the handle of the door, but he paused in doubt, for he had no excuse.

The next minute the excuse had come, and he entered quickly, to find Lacey writing, and ready to look up inquiringly.

"Beg pardon, sir, thought you might be in your bedroom. Didn't happen to see a little pig-skin purse, did you?"

"No!" said the lieutenant, gruffly.

"Sorry to have interrupted you, sir. Don't see it lying about, sir. Thank ye, sir!"

Jerry had a sharp look round, and then he backed out again to close the door after him, and stand hesitating and shaking his head.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "He ought to be tired out and glad to jump into his bed; and here he is writing! He isn't a writing sort of chap! Never hardly puts pen to paper! What's he writing for at a time like this?"

Jerry shook his head very solemnly, and sat down to wait, with all drowsiness gone and a nervous state of irritation steadily on the increase as he sat on for a time that seemed to be interminable, always on the *qui vive*, and expecting moment by moment to hear something which would give him ample excuse for rushing in.

"And what good will that do?" he argued, as his spirits grew lower and lower. "It'll be too late then, for I ought to be there to stop him. He's half-mad, and if I was there I might prevent it; but he would not have it. He'd tell me I was mad to think of such a thing, and kick me out!"

"Well," he said to himself, after waiting for an interminable time, all worry and indecision, "I've a good mind to risk his being angry; for I'm sure he wants something to eat. I will, before it's too late."

He rose from his seat once more, and was in the act of crossing the lobby, when a piteous cry escaped his lips, for there was a sharp concussion, the windows of the place he was in rattled, and he heard the sound of a heavy fall!

Crying out "Too late! too late!" he dashed at the door, flung it open, and entered.

Chapter Thirty Five.

Dead or Alive?

As Jerry rushed into Lacey's room, it was with the full expectation of seeing the master for whom he had begun to feel a warm respect stretched, face downward, upon the carpet; but

the place was vacant, and, panting and trembling, he ran on to where the heavy curtain draped the bedroom door, swung it aside, and rushed in—there to see that the lieutenant, in shirt and trousers, had fallen upon the bed, from which he was now evidently writhing and struggling to the floor.

Jerry was a man of resource. He had not been servant and valet to gentlemen for years without picking up a great deal—nursing being one of his accomplishments.

“Badly, perhaps fatally, wounded,” he thought, “and immediate aid might be invaluable;” so, with this idea uppermost, he flung himself upon the young officer just as his feet touched the carpet, stooped down, and, by a clever quick motion, seized him round the knees, lifted his legs, and threw him on his back.

“Oh, how could you—how could you?” he cried, as he leant over him, pressing him down with his head on the pillow, and searched him wildly with his eyes, and then with one hand, for the wound.

“Do you hear?” he half-whimpered. “How could you? Oh, Mr Lacey, sir, how could you?”

The young officer’s eyes looked fixed and staring, his face was white and drawn, and his mind was evidently confused and wandering. For the first few moments he struggled violently; then he lay back panting with his lips apart, while Jerry went on excitedly searching for the wound, but without success.

Then he turned his eyes to the floor, looking about in all directions for the pistol, then about the bed, which had not been turned down, but without avail; and his eyes sought those of the young man again as he held him, and with one hand felt for the pulsation at the heart.

“What’s matter?” said Lacey, thickly.

At that moment Jerry caught sight of a glass on the dressing-table, and he uttered a cry, but felt confused and puzzled directly after; for his common sense told him that, if the lieutenant had tried to poison himself, whatever he had taken would not have gone off with a tremendous bang inside and made the windows rattle.

“What’s matter?” said the lieutenant again, in a confused way; “did I—did I—tumble out of bed?”

"No, no. I saved you, sir!" whimpered Jerry, hysterically. "Oh, sir, where is it? What have you done?"

"I d' know," said Lacey, confusedly. Then, with the power to think returning, he seized Jerry's hands, and tried to remove them from his chest. "Here! what are you doing?"

"Doing! doing!" cried Jerry. "Oh, why don't you speak! Can you hold out while I fetch the doctor?"

"Doctor? I d' know?" cried Lacey, staring in a stupefied way at his servant, and then growing angry at being held down. "Here! what's the matter? Have I been taken ill?"

"Ill? It's ten times worse than that, sir. Hold still. Where are you hurt? Where's the pistol?"

"Confound you! Will you leave go?" cried the lieutenant, who grew angry as his senses returned; and, gripping Jerry firmly, he wrenched himself round, made a violent effort, forced his man back, and rose to a sitting position on the edge of the bed.

"Mr Lacey, sir, don't!" cried Jerry.

"Oh, won't I!" cried the lieutenant. "What do you mean by it? How dare you, sir? Couldn't you sit up late without getting at my spirit-stand? What is it—brandy?"

"That it ain't, sir! I never touched a drop!" cried Jerry, indignantly. "Don't, sir! You hurt me!"

"Hurt you? Yes, you dog, I mean to! You hurt me pretty well! Why, you're as drunk as a piper!"

"Tell you I ain't, sir!" cried Jerry. "I took four cups o' coffee to keep me awake. That's all. But—but, Mr Lacey, sir, didn't you do it? Didn't you hurt yourself?—didn't—didn't—"

"Didn't—didn't'—don't stammer and stutter like that! Confound you! What do you mean by dragging me out of bed in this way? You must have been at the spirits!"

"Tell you I haven't!" roared Jerry, indignantly. "It's taking a man's character away, sir!"

"Then what do you mean by seizing me like this?"

"I heard a noise, sir—I thought you'd been losing money all night to Mr Frayne, sir, and that you'd shot yourself, sir—with your pistol, sir. Ain't yer, sir?"

"I shot myself? Pistol? Why, Brigley, you must be tipsy!"

"Which I ain't, sir; indeed, I ain't!" protested Jerry. "But are you really all right, sir? I heered a horful bang."

"I'm so stupidly confused and sleepy, I hardly know," said Lacey. "I suppose I must have rolled off the bed."

"Then you ain't hurt, sir?"

"Not that I know of."

"But something went off, sir."

"Soda-water."

"Oh, no, sir; hundred times as loud as that."

"Never mind. I'm thirsty. Bring me some."

"Yes, sir; directly, sir," cried Jerry, and he hurried out into the lobby, to come back in a minute with a glass of the sparkling anti-feverish water, to find the lieutenant bathing his face.

"Hah, that's refreshing!" said Lacey, returning the glass to the waiter Jerry held in his trembling hands. "Why, you look as if you had seen a ghost, Brigley!"

"I thought I was going to see one, sir—yours! And you ain't hurt a bit?"

"It's quite bad enough to have to be shot by other people, Brigley, without trying to hurt oneself. But how came you to think such a thing?"

"Well, sir—I—"

"Well, you what?"

"—Have heered of such things, sir, with gents—as has been in great trouble, sir—as lost a deal o' money, sir."

Lacey frowned.

"Ever been with a gentleman who did such a thing?"

"Well, yes, sir—almost, sir—not exactly, sir; but I thought he had, sir."

"That's a nice clear way of expressing yourself. Well, don't run away with that idea, again. I don't like to be snatched out of my sleep in that fashion. What time is it? Morning gun fired?"

Jerry's jaw dropped, and he stood staring over the empty soda-water glass.

"I said had the morning gun been fired!" remarked Lacey, sharply.

Jerry's face began to wrinkle all over, and there was a peculiar twinkle in his eyes as they met his master's.

"Yes, sir, the gun's gone off a quarter of a hour ago."

"There, be off! Call me in time to dress for parade."

"Yes, sir; of course, sir. Very sorry, sir. My mistake, sir. But don't you see how it was?"

"No; I'm too sleepy to see anything; but don't make any more such mistakes."

"No, sir—cert'nly not, sir; but don't you see, sir, how it was, really?"

"No; unless you'd had too much coffee!"

"Well, sir, then, as you will keep on thinking it was coffee or something else, I must, for my character's sake, sir, explain."

"Not this morning, Brigley, thank you; some other time."

"Won't take a moment, sir," persisted Jerry. "You see, I'd got thinking, sir, through having had a hawkward experience of the sort, that you might do something of the kind; and I was actually meaning to walk in and stop you, when there was that tremenjus noise, and I thought you'd made it."

"And I did not!" said the lieutenant, angrily. "Now be off!"

"No, sir, it wasn't you," said Jerry, grinning; "and it only shows how easy we can make mistakes. You see now, sir? It was the morning gun."

Chapter Thirty Six.

A Secret's Limit.

"He might have told me," Jerry said to himself. "I've done all I could for him, and kep' his secret when I've felt at times as if I must shout out 'Sir Richard' all over the barracks. I call it mean: that's what I call it—mean! It ain't as if I hadn't shown him as he might trust me. I should have said a deal to him in a fatherly sort o' way to show him that it wasn't the kind o' thing for a gen'leman to do. I should have pointed out to him as he did wrong last time in going off, and what a lot of injury it did him; and he knew it, or else he wouldn't have kep' it so close, and gone without letting me know. But once bit twice shy, and I'm not going to be bit again. I'm not going to break my heart fancying he's made a hole in the water. That's what set me thinking about the lieutenant as I did. If he wasn't one of the easiest-going bits o' human machinery as ever lived, he'd have been awfully nasty with me for serving him as I did. No, I'm not going to humbug after S'Richard; and I'm not going to worry. I was ready to be friends if he liked to trust me; but he didn't, and there it ends."

Jerry sat sunning himself outside the officers' quarters as he mused in this way, and felt a bit resentful against Dick as he went on.

"I know where he's off to. He's gone to see some lawyer fellow up in town to get advice, and he'll have to pay for it. I could have given him just as good, and he could have had it free, gratis, for nothing; but stuff as people don't have to pay for they think ain't worth having. Hullo! here comes Dan'l Lambert. Mornin'!"

"Morning," said Brumpton, rather gruffly, as he halted in front of Jerry, with his battered bombardon in his hand, evidently on his way from the band-room to the sergeants' quarters.

"Any news? Ain't come back, I s'pose?" said Jerry.

"No; he won't come back till he's brought," said Brumpton rather sternly. Then, suddenly, "I told you about my bit of a row with Wilkins?"

Jerry nodded.

"There's a fine upset about that. Can't tell yet what's to be the end of it. I don't want to lose my stripes."

"Oh, they ought to let you off," said Jerry.

Sergeant Brumpton shook his head.

"Discipline," he said, "discipline. I oughtn't to have let my temper get the better of me."

"But the officers won't be able to help laughing. He must have looked like a periwinkle stuck in his shell. Go and tell him you're very sorry, and shake hands."

"Ah! you don't understand our ways here, Brigley. He wouldn't take the apology. He don't like me going there to practice, because it was all through young Smithson, for he hates him like poison."

"Yes, or he wouldn't have said what he did," cried Jerry. "It was too bad."

"Yes, too bad," said the sergeant, "when the poor lad didn't even take his own instruments away with him."

"Didn't he?" cried Jerry, rather excitedly. "What, not them big and little silver-keyed flutes?"

"No; they've got them up in his quarters, keeping them for him. Some of the men are precious wild about what Wilkins said."

Jerry made no reply, but stood rubbing one side of his nose with his finger.

"Well, why don't you speak?" said the sergeant.

"Because I was thinking," said Jerry; "and a man can't think of one thing and talk of another at the same time."

"What were you thinking, then?"

"I was thinking it seemed strange for him to leave those flutes behind. They was his own, and he set a deal of store by them."

"Well, what do you make of it, now you have thought it?"

"What do you?" replied Jerry.

"That it looks as if he meant to come back."

"Yes," said Jerry, mysteriously; "it do look like that. Are they trying to find him?"

"Of course, they are trying their best. They won't stop till they have."

"But ain't it making a deal o' fuss about one chap, and him not a reg'lar fighting man?"

"'Tisn't that," said the sergeant; "it's the principle of the thing. They wouldn't care about losing one man or a dozen; it's keeping up the discipline. Young Smithson 'll be caught, and he'll be pretty severely punished, poor lad. I rather liked Smithson."

"Liked him!" said Jerry, acidly; "why, of course, you did. Why, I like him—even me, who don't make many friends—I can tell you. You think, then, they might ketch him?"

"I do," said the sergeant, "sooner or later. They're sure to. Well, I must be off. I've got my own troubles to think about without his."

"Good-bye, sergeant," said Jerry, with a friendly nod, and Brumpton went on, while Jerry's whole expression changed. His eyes glittered, the colour came in his face, and he thrust his hands in his pockets as far down as he could get them.

"He wouldn't have gone off without telling me, pore chap! I'm sure of it. It was master and man between us, and full confidence, as you may say. He wouldn't desert—he's too much the gentleman—and he wouldn't go to see lawyers without speaking first. As to his going away, that settles it. He wouldn't leave them flutes if he were making a bolt. Why, he didn't when he ran away before. That settles it, and no mistake. Jerry Brigley, my lad, there's something wrong."

What was to be done?

That was a question Jerry could not answer, and he went about the barracks talking with the men, asking who had seen Dick last, and gleaning all about his leave, and that one of the band had seen him going down the High Street that same afternoon.

Waiting till Wilkins was away, Jerry made his way to the band-room, where he obtained confirmation of the sergeant's remarks about the flute-case, and here he began to drop dark hints of the vaguest nature. These, however, fell upon fertile soil, and struck root, and shot up into plants at a very rapid rate. In other words, Jerry's hints became solid, and from the band-room went forth the rumour that Dick Smithson had gone down the town, been persuaded to enter one of the low-class public-houses, and had there been robbed and ill-used.

Then a private in Lacey's company announced that he had had a similar experience down by the docks, and said that if he had not fought like a savage he would have lost his life.

News flies fast in a regiment where the men have so little out of the routine to attract their attention, and, consequently, it was soon the common talk of the barracks that Dick Smithson, of the band, had been "done to death" somewhere in the lower part of the city.

That night the rumour reached the mess-room. One of the officers had heard it, and in a few minutes it was the sole topic of conversation.

Men talked of the first time they had seen Dick Smithson, and reminded one another of his playing and the strange way in which he had joined the regiment.

At last, as the band finished one of the pieces in the evening's programme, the colonel, after a few words with the doctor, sent his servant to tell Wilkins to come to the table; and, upon the bandmaster appearing, the doctor addressed him in a serious tone, but with a humorous twinkle of the eye.

"Is this true, Wilkins?" he said.

"I beg pardon, sir, is what true?"

"That in a fit of jealousy you have tried to pitch young Smithson into the river, to be carried out to sea or to one of Her Majesty's ships, to form the nucleus of a new band?"

"Not a word of truth in it, sir, I assure you. Really I—"

"Stop a moment, man! You were exceedingly jealous of him."

"Really no, sir. I only did what I thought was right to keep the boy from growing too conceited."

"Well, of course, pitching him into the river would have that effect; but it strikes me that it will get you into difficulties."

"Really, sir—I assure you, sir, if it was the last word I had to utter, sir—I didn't do anything of the kind."

"Of course not, Wilkins," said the colonel, quietly; "the doctor is only quizzing you. I cannot believe that you would be guilty of such a dastardly act. But do you think anything of the kind has happened?"

"No, sir; I don't think such a thing could have taken place."

"I hope not; but you have heard the rumour?"

"Yes, sir; the men are talking about nothing else."

"One moment," cried the colonel; "you have seen a great deal of the young man. Do you think he was likely to get into bad company?"

"That he wasn't, sir!" cried someone excitedly; and Jerry advanced from where he had been waiting upon his master, and now stood close to the colonel, gesticulating with an empty claret bottle in his hand.

"Silence, sir!" cried the colonel; "how dare you speak!"

"Beg pardon, sir; I felt abound to speak because I know Dick Smithson isn't at all likely to go to any low places."

The colonel frowned; but he said no more, and Jerry was allowed to go back to his place.

That night the superintendent of police was summoned to the barracks, and had a long talk with the colonel and major.

"No, gentlemen, I don't think it is at all likely. They get down to the rougher houses, and drink and stay a day or two; but the landlords get rid of them as soon as they have spent all their money. But, as you've sent for me, I'll set a couple of our sharpest men to go from house to house, and then report to you."

The superintendent left to perform his mission, and orders were given to the military provosts; but another day passed away, and neither civil nor military police had anything to report. No one had seen the young bandsman on his way to some distant railway station, and men began to shake their heads, while Jerry's face looked hollow from anxiety. At the same time, though, he felt a kind of pride in the fact that he was constantly being questioned by those who knew that he and Dick had been on friendly terms, this culminating in his being stopped one day in the street by a couple of ladies.

"You are Mr Lacey's servant, are you not?" said the younger.

"Yes, ma'am—oh, I beg your pardon, miss. I didn't know you behind your veil."

"Has anything been heard of Smithson?"

"No, ma'am. I'm sorry to say that—"

There was a sigh, and the lady turned away, followed by her companion.

"Well," said Jerry, "she might have stopped to hear all I had to say. My word, now people have got to like him! Even her. Well, he saved her life. What can have come to him? I daren't go and say all I think, for, after all, it mayn't be true. I know: I'll wait a week, and then, right or wrong, I'll speak; for I can't keep his secret longer than that."

Chapter Thirty Seven.

The Coward's Blow.

Fully determined that there must be no scandal, Dick resolved to await his opportunity, and then confront his cousin, to demand of him that he should quickly vacate his position; and, to this end, he watched for a chance to meet him somewhere quite alone. But he very soon became aware of the fact that not only had Mark recognised, but avoided, him, till one day, when idling along about a couple of miles from the town, there was Mark ahead, going on in front, as if inviting him to follow, and leading him on right away.

What Mark's object was in following his devious course along the lanes more and more into the country Richard Frayne did not pause to consider; all he thought was that at last, after many efforts, he was going to run his cousin down, and bring him to bay right away from the possibility of interruption, and where, out in the open fields, they would, for the time being, occupy the position not of officer and private—with the tremendous barrier of rank between them, which was like some large breastwork protecting Mark from assault—but as man to man.

And there, a few hundred yards in advance, Mark walked rapidly on, never once, as far as his cousin could see, looking back, though Richard felt sure that he was aware of being followed, and was awaiting his opportunity to get out of sight and then make for the town.

Richard knew that by running he might now overtake the young officer, but he left this for a last resource, meaning to walk steadily on until he caught up to Mark or forced him to turn back and meet him face to face.

The way grew more rural and secluded, and the chalk hills, with their sides broken up by frost and weathering, stood out white, and dotted with patches of heath and bracken. Here and there a dense copse could be seen, while in sheltered hollows—forming in the distance what looked like squares worked in tapestry patterns—was a huge fabric of green, looped and flowered, where the hops hung in luxuriant grape-like clusters.

Every now and then Mark was lost to sight, as he plunged into some copse, following a devious footpath, but Richard caught sight of him again soon after. Then the quarry was missed once more, as he crossed one of the hop-gardens; yet, always the same, Richard dogged him with unerring patience for hours.

"What does he mean?" thought Richard at last. "He can't know I am following him. He is simply having a long walk to keep himself in training, and will soon turn back."

At last, about half an hour after passing a long village lying low down in a hollow among the hills, and where there was no sign of farmhouse or cottage anywhere in the broken, wooded landscape, Mark plunged into a great patch of coppice, which had been cut down for hop-poles a few years before, and had sprung up again, forming a dense wilderness of ash, hazel, and sweet chestnut, running right up a steep, bank-like hill, away below which, well sheltered from the north and westerly gales,

lay another of the many hop-fields, heavy with its green and golden bines.

Here all at once Richard found himself at fault, and he stood gazing onward, with a feeling of annoyance rapidly growing as the thought came insistent that, after all, he was to have his long, exciting walk for nothing.

Only a few minutes before he had seen the erect figure pass in among the trees, and it must, he felt, be exactly where he stood; but there was no sight of it going onward, and, as far as he could make out, there was no lane near, unless one passed over by the red-brick building which topped an eminence to the right—a building with a couple of the great cowls of the hop-kilns rising from its roof.

"He must have made for these," thought Richard. And feeling pretty certain that if he took a short cut down through the hop-garden he would strike the track, and find his cousin coming up the lane deep down in the coppice, or passing onward on his return, he passed rapidly on. Down he went along the steep slope, threading the tall, thin growing-poles to right and left, till he came suddenly upon the edge of the hop-garden, with its little hills, each squared by its four poles, running in direct lines, and forming shady alleys, completely embowered in many places by the vines which festooned the poles and leaped over from side to side.

Keeping to the edge of the garden for a few yards, and passing alley after alley, till he came upon the end of one which looked fairly open, and which ran in the direction of the oast-house on the hill, Richard was about to plunge down this, when, all at once, there was a sharp, thin sound, followed by the loud whirr of wings, as an early covey of strongly-pinioned partridges, alarmed by the crack, sprang up, and flew over the tops of the poles, completely hidden by the vines.

Eager and excited now, Richard passed into the next alley and the next, gazing sharply down them for him who had struck that match to light a cigar.

"At last!" he said to himself; for not a dozen yards down the next—a particularly dark, thickly-embowered lane of verdure—there stood Mark, with his back to him, holding a second match to his cigar, from which the grey smoke rose up, to disappear amid the vine-like leaves.

Drawing a long breath, Richard walked down this alley. But Mark did not move, standing, coolly smoking there, till his cousin was within a couple of yards, when he started round as if surprised, and the two young men stood in the greenish twilight of that solitude, utterly hidden, while in all probability there was not a human being within a couple of miles.

"Ah, my lad," said Mark, quietly, "having a walk? Rather hot."

He turned as if to go, but was arrested by Richard's imperious order—

"Stop!"

Mark turned round, frowning and scowling.

"You don't belong to my regiment, my lad, but you know that this is not the way to address an officer."

"That will do, Mark Frayne," cried Richard, sternly. "It is time we understood one another."

"Mark Frayne!" cried the officer, angrily. Then, with a half-laugh, "Oh! I see—205th, from the Town Barracks. You have got hold of my name, my lad."

"Got hold of your name!" exclaimed Richard, angrily. "There, no more of that. I tell you I can bear this no longer. It is time we came to an understanding."

"My good fellow, have you been drinking?" said Mark, with a forced laugh; "or is it a touch of sunstroke? Here, you had better make for the nearest stream, have a good draught of water, and then get back to barracks."

"So that's how Mr Mark Frayne would prescribe for sunstroke!" said Richard, sarcastically.

"My good fellow, we are not in garrison now, and I like to be kind and friendly to men in the ranks; but there are bounds. Recollect that you are addressing your officer, and do not be insolent!"

"Insolent?" cried Richard.

"Yes, sir, insolent!" said Mark, speaking in a low voice. "You have got hold of my name; but I am Sir Mark Frayne."

"Mark Frayne," cried Richard, fiercely, "and my cousin! Once more I tell you that this can go on no longer!"

"Are you mad, fellow?" said Mark, speaking beneath his breath.

"Almost, at being face to face with you alone after all I have suffered at your hands! There, set aside this miserable show of not knowing me! You recognised me that night of the ball. You knew me directly, though you tried hard to assume ignorance. Now, then, I don't want to be hard upon you. I have held back from going to lawyers, for I have felt that it would be better if we settled the matter ourselves. Do you dare to tell me that you do not know me?"

Mark gazed at him searchingly, and then his face seemed to light up.

"Why, yes; of course, I know you now—the bandsman Smithson. Of course. You are the man who helped me out of the burning tent."

"Yes; I saved the life of one who had sent me into this miserable exile!"

"Of course, I see now. You had a serious illness after, Smithson, and it affected your head. The doctor told me all about it."

"It was needless," said Richard, gazing full in the eyes which were half-closed, and which kept on glancing from their corners up and down the long dim alley where they stood.

"No; I am glad he told me, my lad. That explains a good deal. Now, take my advice, and get back to barracks. You were not fit to come so far."

This assumption of ignorance staggered Richard for the moment. Then, with his voice sounding very deep and stern—

"Look here, Mark," he said; "your poor father is dead, but I presume that my aunt is living, and for her sake I am unwilling to take steps that may give her pain. You proved yourself an unprincipled scoundrel over that bill transaction, and now, even as an officer, you cannot act like a gentleman."

Mark was very pale now as he stood facing his cousin; but he showed no sign of resentment, and Richard went on—

"Your conduct towards Miss Deane has been that of a dishonourable blackguard; towards Mr Lacey, that of a sharper and a cheat. You see, I know; but I am willing to spare you, for your mother's sake. You will at once communicate with your lawyers, and tell them your assumption of the property and title has been a mistake, and that you are willing to surrender all claims at once."

"Poor fellow!" said Mark, softly, as he stood with his hands in his jacket pockets and with a peculiar thin smile upon his tightened lips; "the result of the fever. What a fancy to get into his head!"

"Do you mean to take that line?" said Richard. "Think better of it, and give it up. It will save you trouble, your mother pain, and I promise you that I will not be ungenerous toward you."

"How singular these crazes are!" said Mark, softly, as if speaking to himself.

"Then you mean to fight me?" said Richard.

"My poor fellow, what nonsense you have got into your bewildered head! I had a cousin, Sir Richard Frayne, who once, in a mad fit, attacked me, and afterwards threw himself into a river, and was drowned."

"And was not drowned," said Richard, quietly.

"Yes, he was drowned. They found the body, and he was buried close to his estate, and in the church there is a handsome monument to his memory, saying kindly things that he did not deserve, for he committed suicide in remorse for having obtained money by false pretences."

"You are an unmitigated scoundrel, Mark!" said Richard, with his brow now knit angrily. "Once more, will you accept my terms?"

"He is dead and buried," said Mark, with his eyes more than half-shut now; "and if Richard Frayne rose from the dead no one would believe his tale."

"Will you accept my terms, or must I denounce you as one who has proved treacherous to his friend, acted like a blackleg at cards, and who obtained a hundred pounds by forging his cousin's name, and whose title and estate he now holds?"

Mark stood there, white as a sheet, glaring at the speaker.

"How will you stand then, Mark, with officers and men of honour. Take my offer before you fall."

"I tell you," whispered Mark huskily, "that Richard Frayne is dead, and that you are an impostor."

"And I tell you that I will have no mercy now," cried Richard, excitedly. "I tried to spare you, but this life is intolerable since you came here. Once more, will you accept my terms?"

"Impostor!"

"Then take your chance!"

"Take yours!" cried Mark, in the same low whisper, as he snatched a revolver from his pocket and fired quickly at his cousin, who sprang back, dragged a hop-pole from the side of the alley, snapping it in two, and, wild with agony and excitement, made a rush at Mark, who met it by standing firm, now taking aim at his cousin's head.

But he did not fire; for all at once Richard's knees gave way, the stout pole fell from his grasp, and, flinging up his hands, he swayed over backward with a crash, bearing down a portion of the hop-bine as he fell.

Mark stood there with his arm still rigidly extended, but altering his position now. Then, taking a step or two forward, he bent over, gazing fixedly at his cousin's distorted face, and taking aim once more as he stooped. He was about to draw the trigger, when the sharp barking of a dog arose from two or three hundred yards away.

The barking ceased, and Mark hurriedly thrust the pistol back in his pocket, but a sudden thought struck him, and, quickly stooping down, he seized his cousin's clenched right hand, dragged the fingers apart, and placed the weapon in his grasp; then laying the broken piece of hop-pole back, as if it had been broken in the fall, he rose and looked sharply up and down the alley, and stepped into the next, after peering through and looking up and down that.

The next moment his white and alarmed face reappeared, avoiding the body lying prone, as his eyes peered here and there till they fell upon the freshly-lit cigar he had dropped from his lips; for a faint streak of smoke rose from where it lay, and betrayed its presence.

Reaching forward, he caught it up, drew back and disappeared through the drooping hops, passing from one alley to another, till he elected to walk straight on to a coppice on the other side; here lighting his cigar afresh, he began to walk back toward Ratcham at a slow steady pace, and without meeting a soul; neither did he hear the barking of the dog again.

Chapter Thirty Eight.

Something in the Hops.

The hops that year had been looking magnificent, and some of the growers were chuckling as they thought of the number of hundredweight that would go to the acre, while others took a prejudiced view of the case from a dread of the plentifulness of the crop bringing them down to a state of cheapness that would, when the cost of growing, picking, kilning, and packing had been deducted, leave nothing to pay the rent.

Then a change had come—a rapid change. There had been a fortnight's dry weather, and, as if by magic, the beautiful growths began to look foul, black, and yellow.

It was very simple—a few tiny flies came and laid eggs: the eggs hatched into little insects, and before many hours had elapsed these little insects, without waiting to become flies, had children, and these had children, and these had children as hard as ever they could, while the mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers kept on increasing until the vine-leaves became covered. These grew into hundreds, hundreds into thousands and tens and hundreds of thousands, then millions, and then into hundreds and thousands of millions, and then on and on till billions and trillions, and all the other brain-devouring lions covered the hop-grower's crops, threatening destruction to his hopes.

Then out came the engine to attack the plague.

It was an old parish fire-engine that used to live beneath the bells in the square tower of a church not many miles away. It had once been red; and upon rare occasions, when a cottage or wheat-rick caught or was set on fire and a glow gave warning, there would be a great deal of shouting, the clerk's house was raced to for the keys, and then the old engine was dragged out by its cross-handle, and a cheering crowd would trundle it for

miles to the scene of the fire, which was generally expiring by the time it was reached. If the fire was not out, boys and men dragged down the coils of hose and the suction-pipe, which was run into a pond. Buckets were dipped, and water was poured down the cylinders to moisten the suckers, and ran through, because the leathers were all dried-up. Then the handles were seized and worked up and down, making a good deal of noise, but no water began to squirt, which did not matter (for the hose was all cracked, and would not have conveyed it); and at last everything was packed up again, and, the fire being out for want of more food, the engine was dragged back to its dwelling-place in the belfry, to go on growing older and more mildewy and useless.

It took a great many years to teach people that, but for the show of the thing, a great deal more good would have resulted if everybody had carried a tin mug of water and thrown it upon the fire. Still, they did learn this truth at last, and the result was that one day the old fire-engine was sold by auction in the marketplace of the nearest town and bought for a trifle by one of the hop-growers.

From that day the engine began to lead a new life, for it was cleaned up, newly leathered and suckered, and kept in a barn, from which it was dragged year after year to put out a plague as bad as fire.

Upon the morning in question there was a little procession from the oast-houses down to the gardens in the hollow, where, in a sheltered bower, a fire was lit under a huge copper, which had led the way; a great water-tub brought fluid from the muddy pond, and a kind of hot soup was made, bucketfuls of which were mixed with tubs of water; the suction-pipe of the engine was inserted in these, the hose and branch attached, and the slaughter of the insects began down between the rows of hop-poles, where the blackened, blight-covered hops clustered, twined, and hung.

Fizz-fuzz, spitter-sputter! Away flew the medicated water in a poisonous spray, and row after row of the blighted hops was relieved of the insect enemies, while the farmer's men kept the fire going, the water boiling, and the poison brewing to save the crop.

There was just enough room for the little engine to be dragged down between the hills—as they term them—of the hops without much crushing; but the labourers took good care to empty it first, and even then the wheels made deep ruts in the

well-dug soil. After some hours' work the men had drawn it well into the middle of the garden; and while two pumped and another directed a fine spray under the leaves and among the tendrils, others plodded steadily along from the copper and tubs, each bearing a couple of buckets, and carefully picking a fresh way from time to time so as to avoid the shower of fine rain dripping from the verdant arches overhead.

"Hope nobody won't taste none o' this stuff in his yale, Joey," said one of the bucket-bearers, as he tossed the medicated water into the big tub from which the suction-pipe of the engine drew its supply, and as he spoke he widened the perennial grin which dwelt upon his puckered face.

"Do un good," growled Joey, who was directing the spray from the branch so as to spread it over as many leaves as possible. "Make un teetotal, Smiler."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the man with the buckets; "deal o' teetotal about you, Joey. Make yale taste, though, won't it?"

"Na-a-a-ay! Rain'll wash it all off in no time, Smiler. There, fetch some more."

"All very fine, Joey; but its wa-arm down here. Wind don't come."

"Well, who wants wind to knock the poles down?—best lewed garden, this, on the fa-arm. Fatch some more!"

Smiler, as he was called, went off with his empty buckets, trudged back to the copper and water-barrel, justifying his name at every step; for he smiled at the clods of earth, the weeds which had sprung up, at the poles, and then at the horse in the shafts of the water-barrel cart, before refilling his buckets and starting back down a fresh row of hops, between which the sun came glinting and sending shafts of silver arrows to the rich soil, out of which peeped wool clippings, shoddy, greasy rags, and other indescribable rubbish used by the farmer to fertilise his field.

When abreast of the engine, hidden from him by three or four rows of poles, Smiler set down his pails with a clank, smiled round him, and wiped his wet brow with one bare arm, then the other side in the same way, the operation being so satisfactory that he continued it all over his face. Then, smiling more than ever, he stooped, picked up his buckets, went on a few yards to where there was an opening into the next row, turned himself

edgewise, and passed through with his buckets swung round, and was about to pass through into another green arcade, but stopped, smiling still, and put down his load once more with a louder rattle of the handles, while *clank clank* went the engine and *whish whish* and *sputter* the cloud of spray among the leaves.

"Now then, Smiler, come on!" shouted one of the men with the engine, still hidden, but close at hand.

"Hi! Joey," shouted Smiler.

"What's the matter?—found a hop-dog?"

"Nay! Here's a tipsy swaddy lying dead asleep; shall I gi'e him a bucket o' hop-wash?"

"Gahn! Bring that stuff."

"But I tell ye he's tipsy, boy. Come, all on yer, and see!"

The clanking of the engine stopped at once, for it was very hot there, and the diversion was acceptable; so, leaving the fine rain dripping from the hop-bine, three men came, dragging their legs after them, threading their way through the poles till they all stood together, wiping their streaming faces with their bare arms, and gazing down at the recumbent figure, at which the bucket-bearer smiled, the others following his example, and ending in a hearty chuckle, in which Smiler joined.

"Shall I gi'e him a bucket, Joey?" he said again.

"Nay," said the man addressed. "Nobody never give you a bucket, Smiler, when you lay down in a ditch."

The others laughed, and Smiler winced a little.

"Make him wet outside as well as in!"

"Yah! We don't want to spoil his red coat," said Joey; "he's got it pratty will syled without. Why, he must ha' been here all night! Here, soger, wake up!"

There was no movement.

"D'yer hear? Right about face! 'Tention!"

"Well, he must have had a good wet! How did un come here?"

"I d'know," said one of the men. "Take two shillin' worth o' yale to make a man like that."

"Ay," said Smiler. "Know how they do it?"

"Saves up," said Joey.

"Yah! They don't get no money to save. I'll tell 'ee. My cousin, Billy Weekes, 'listed—you all knew Billy?"

"Ay!" chorussed the others, as they stood gazing down at the scarlet-coated figure lying with its face hidden by a drooping tangle of hops caused by the breaking of a pole.

"Billy tode me," continued Smiler, "as, when one on 'em gets leave, he goes round among his mates, and they all gi'es him a penny or twopence apiece—hundred on 'em, p'r'aps—and that sets him up!"

"Ay?" said Joey. "And when their turn comes he gi'es them all a penny?"

"Yes; that's it—all round. So they chaps as goes out allus has some'at to spend."

"And a very good way, too," said Joey, chuckling. "Well, I could drink a quarr now, and I've got a penny; s'pose you three chaps all gi'es me one apiece, for my throat's as dry as a lime-basket."

The men looked at one another and chuckled.

"Hadn't us better wake un up?" said Smiler, at last.

"Ay, 'fore he gets a drenching with the hop-wash," said Joey. "Here! hi! soger! Why, he's got a bottle in his fist here still. It's—"

The man, who had bent down low and drawn aside the verdant veil of hop-bine, started back in alarm; for, as the sunshine was let in, a couple of large vipers, which had been nestling close up to the figure, raised their heads and began to crawl away.

"Look at the nedders!" cried Smiler. "Aren't stung him, have they?"

"Nay," cried Joey, hanging back, "that arn't all. 'Tarn't a bottle he's got; it's a pistol!"

Two of the men turned as if to run away, but at that moment another bucket-bearer came up, and there was a shout from up by the fire to know why the spraying had stopped.

"Hi!—all on yer! Coome here!" yelled Smiler.

"What's he been shootin'?" cried one of the men who had turned to go.

"Hissen," growled Joey, with a horrified look. "He's a dead un, lads, and been here for days."

Mastering the feeling of shrinking which had come over him, Joey went down upon one knee, amidst the awful silence which prevailed, and stretched forth a hand to draw the figure out into a patch of sunlight, but a shout in chorus from his companions made him snatch back his hand with a violent start.

"Yah!—don't touch him," they all cried.

"Why?—poor lad," protested Joey. "We can't leave him here!"

"Mustn't touch 'im till there's been a inkwess," said Smiler, excitedly.

"I don't keer for no inkwesses," grumbled Joey; "I shall want to come here directly to wash my hops."

"What's the matter?" cried the first of several men who came down the narrow alley. "Ingin busted?"

"Nay; look ye here," cried Smiler, excitedly, and there was a low, suppressed exclamation from the group that crowded up.

"Better get a gate and carry him out," said one.

"Couldn't get a gate down here," said another.

"And yer mustn't touch 'im till there's been a inkwess," cried Smiler.

"Is he dead?" said one of the new-comers.

"Ay," said one of the first four. "We sin the nedders come away from him. Stinged to death."

"Nay, he's not bitten," cried Joey. "Here's his little pistol. Why, he's one o' they chaps as blows brass things in the band."

As he spoke, the man took the rusty pistol from the tight fingers which clutched it, and then uttered a cry.

"What's the matter?"

"His hand arn't cold," cried Joey, and, quickly turning the figure right over into the sunshine, he gazed down excitedly, and pointed at a great red stain on the breast and side of the scarlet tunic, hidden until then, and dry now and dark.

"But he's quite dead, arn't he?" said Smiler.

"Nay, he's not dead. You can feel his heart beat right up into his throat. Come and take hold of his legs, two on you, and Smiler and me 'll carry this end."

"Where to?" asked one of the men, who seized a leg.

"Tak' un up to the oast-house. Here! one o' you go and fatch a policemun and 'nother on you goo right on and tell doctor what we found. How soon can you get there?"

"'N 'our, cross the fields."

"Cut, then. He'll gi'e you a ride back in his chay."

The two men started, and, the figure being raised, it was carefully borne along the dark green alley out into the open sunshine, and then along to the shelter of a huge espalier, kept there to shelter the hop-garden from the western gales.

Not a word was spoken, the men keeping still and walking as if awestricken along by the great green bank, startling the velvet-coated blackbirds, which flew out on either side and skimmed along near the great flowery ditch, and passed over the top a hundred yards ahead.

Twice over a cotton-tailed rabbit darted out of the hops and plunged into the ditch, to reach its burrow in the sandy bank, while on and on the men tramped with their burden, whose bright scarlet coat, laced with gold, stood out vividly against the green of the hops on one side and that of the tall hedge on the other.

"Nay, he's only quite a boy," said Smiler, who, as soon as his remonstrance had been conscientiously disregarded, lent himself to the task with far more energy than he had directed toward carrying the pails.

"Say, one of you," cried Joey, "go and lay that old bed out in the oast—one I had last year for kiln-watching."

"What that there in the hop-pocket?"

"That's it, lad;" and another man ran forward up the hillside.

A few minutes later the burden was borne in through the wide entrance of the building to where the man who preceded them had dragged out the rough mattress used by the watcher through the night of the clear coal fires. And here in the cool shade the burden was gently laid; and the men stood round in silence, looking at the pale face before them and then at each other as if asking what to do next.

"He's gone!" whispered Smiler, whose grotesque face gave him the aspect of enjoying it all as some horrible jest.

For they had hardly decently composed the stiffened figure upon its soft elastic couch before it uttered a low, deep groan.

"Nay," said Joey, in a whisper, "he's with us yet, lads; men don't die when you can see that."

A shudder ran through the group as they leaned forward to gaze at that to which the man pointed, and there plainly to be seen in the great windowless place by the light which came in through the broad, high doorway, they gazed at a slowly-increasing stain which came out upon the scarlet tunic hard by the blackened dried-up patch there at the side.

For the movement had started the wound bleeding afresh, and a bit of experience when a fellow-labourer had his arm crushed in a threshing-machine years before had taught the speaker that where bleeding continues there must be life still left in the sufferer's veins.

Chapter Thirty Nine.

A good Genius.

They were a very ignorant rustic lot these poor farm labourers, but they knew that certain things were now necessary, and Joey, taking the lead as they waited for the help of the surgeon, gave the orders, which were executed at once.

One man seized a clean bucket, and trotted off down the hill to where in the bottom there was a dark dipping place in the lonely narrow stream, and while he was fetching the clear cold water the leader carefully unfastened the tunic.

"Sharpest knife, one o' you," said Joey, and after a little comparison of blades, most of which were ground more or less on their owner's clumsy boots, he selected one, and carefully slit open the shirt and, cutting away enough to form a pad, he pressed it down upon the wound and checked the bleeding.

"Ought to be tied up," he muttered; "but 'tain't like a cut finger: you can't turn him about. We'll wait till doctor comes."

"Won't yer wash it?" said Smiler, with a grin.

"Nay, doctor 'll do that if it's right; we'll try and give him a drink when the water comes, and bathe his face. What did he go and do that for?"

"Think he did?" said Smiler.

"Why, o' course," said another. "Hadn't he got the pistol lying in his fist?"

"Ay," said Joey. "I s'pose some on 'em ain't very comf'able with them drill-sergeants—shoots theirselves in barracks sometimes. Yer see, when a man 'lists, he can't pitch it up again and say 'I've had enough of this.'"

"No, they're 'bliged to stick to it," said Smiler, "'less someun buys 'em out. I dunno, though, but what I'd ha' liked to be a sojer; it's better than spendin' all yer life in a hop-garden, spuddin' and poling and hoeing."

"You!" said Joey, "you a sojer, Smiler?"

"Well, why not? Course, I know my back's a bit twisted, but it would ha' been right enough if I'd been drilled."

"They'd ha' had to drill something else beside your legs and wings, Smiler," said Joey, giving his companions a queer look.

"Eh? What?"

"That mug o' your'n, else you'd ha' been in the Black Hole half your time for laughin' at your officers."

"Yah! Just as if I can help bein' a good-tempered lookin' chap. Dessay as I should make as good a sojer as most on 'em as you see over yonder at those towns. Better be allus on the smile than lookin' savage at everyone."

"Ay, to be sure, Smiler. Wonder, though, what did make this poor chap do it? He's a young un, too, for a sojer. I say, any on you hear his pistol go off last night?"

No one answered; but the man who held the revolver began to examine it.

"Here, just you mind what you're about with that thing," said Smiler. "I've heard as they'll go off six times o' running. Say, would it hurt un, if I lit my pipe?"

"Nay," said Joey, "and I'd thank one o' you kindly if he'd take mine out o' my pocket and fill and light it for me. Can't be very long now before doctor comes, and I must hold him here downright to stop the bleeding. Ah! I can feel his heart beating just gentle like."

"You can?"

"Ay; and it's a wonder, too. Poor lad! he's been bleeding like a pig."

The lighting of pipes was preceded by the careful putting away of the pistol, and just as the men were all puffing contentedly away, Smiler said—

"Master won't find they ten acres of hops washed if he comes 'ome to-night."

"No," said Joey; "but you can't wash hops when you're finding sojers nearly dead in the alleys.—An' here's the water. Ain't hurried yerself much, lad."

"Who's to run up hill with a pail o' water?" grumbled the man as Smiler began bathing the edge of the wound, after pouring a little water between the lips, but apparently without any effect.

Then the smoking went on in silence for a while, till Smiler asked whether the heart was still beating.

"Ay, I keep feeling it," said Joe. "S'pose one o' you goes up in one o' the cowls and looks out: you'll see if the pleeceman's coming. I'm getting a bit tired o' holding my hand to his heart."

"Let me do it now," said Smiler.

"Nay, I begun it, and I'm going on till the pleeceman comes."

One of the men had climbed up the steps at once, and they heard his heavy feet as he crossed the great loft where the hops were pressed heavily into the pockets. Five minutes after he was down again to announce that the constable was on his way, and a few minutes after the one man stationed at the tiny hamlet a short distance away came in, red-faced and eager, for, saving over a little egg-stealing and mild poaching, it was rare for his services to be called for.

Hence he bustled in, looking very important, and drew out a note-book and pencil, examined the sufferer, asked a few questions, made a show of putting down the answers, with a sad hieroglyphical result, and then turned to Joey.

"Now, then," he said, "I'll take charge of him; and one of you must go for the doctor."

"Doctor!" cried Joe indignantly. "Why, we sent for him goin' on for hour ago."

"Ho! well: stand aside!"

"What for?"

"Don't you stand arguin', or you may get yourself into trouble," said the constable importantly. "Stand aside!"

"Shan't!"

"What!" cried the constable, gripping the labourer by the arm.

"Can't you see what I'm doing? Want the poor young chap to bleed to death?"

"How was I to know?" cried the constable. "Why didn't you say you were doing it? Why don't you tie him up?"

"'Cause I wasn't born a doctor," grumbled Joey. "Hops is my line—I can tie them up. Thought you pleecemen did that sort of thing."

The constable coughed.

"How long will the doctor be?" he said.

"All depen's whether he's at home or not. P'raps he's gone on a twenty mile round."

"Then we'd better get a door and carry him somewhere," suggested the policeman.

"Nay, it's in and out bad enough moving him at all, Joey," cried Smiler. "I won't help move him, for it'll finish him off if we do."

The constable frowned, hesitated, and finally said:

"Well, as you have sent for the doctor, we'll wait."

And they waited for quite two hours before the man who had been again and again sent up to play Sister Anne in the great cowl came down at last to say that he had seen the doctor's chaise coming along the lane, and five minutes after a keen-looking youngish man entered the great barn-like place, examined his patient at once, asking questions the while, and then with clever hands put a stop to further bleeding, bandaged the wound, and contrived that a little water should trickle between the sufferer's lips.

"Now then," said the doctor, "the poor fellow ought to be taken over to Ratcham to the military hospital; but you had better get a door, and we'll lay him on that and you will carry him to the Seven Steers. It isn't above a mile, is it?"

"Mile an harf, sir," said Joe.

"Well, he must be carried there. To-morrow the people at Ratcham will send an ambulance to fetch him. Now, then, a light door."

"Don't see as we can get a door off without tools, sir," said Smiler. "What d'yer say to a huddle?"

"The very thing. We can lift this mattress right on to it, and it will be lighter and easier to carry."

The light hurdle was soon brought, and the rough bed lifted carefully on. Volunteers were plentiful enough, and one of the men was sent on in advance to the little roadside inn, to give warning of the approach of the wounded man, while the four bearers—possibly from the load being what it was—stepped out in regular slow military fashion, and went on along the dusty lane.

"Will he die, sir?" whispered Joey, as they reached the road.

The doctor shook his head.

But fate had destined that the patient should find a different resting-place that night, for before half a mile had been traversed the sound of wheels was heard behind, and the doctor called to the party to step on one side of the lane and to let the waggonette which approached pass by.

This necessitated a halt, which was taken advantage of for a change to be made in the bearers; and, while this was going on, the waggonette was stopped, and the younger of two ladies within the vehicle addressed the doctor.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "An accident?"

"Rather worse than an accident, I'm afraid," said the doctor, raising his hat in a combination of respect and admiration for the speaker. "A young soldier has been found injured by a bullet."

"And you are taking him to Ratcham?"

"No; to the neighbouring public-house. But, may I ask, are you going into Ratcham?"

"Yes, yes," said the lady excitedly, as she rose, held on by the rail of the driver's seat, and peered over the heads of the bearers, adding wildly—"Oh, aunt, aunt! it must be poor Smithson they have found."

"Anna, my dear, what are you going to do?" cried the elder lady from behind her veil.

"Nothing—I—oh, aunt, I—"

The words were faltered out, but the girl's movements were quick and decisive as she unfastened the door at the back of the waggonette and sprang down, the labouring men drawing right and left as she turned to the side of the hurdle.

"It is—it is!" she cried, as she bent over the pallid face and laid her hand upon Dick's forehead.

"You know him, then?" said the doctor eagerly, for his patient began to be of much greater importance in his eyes.

"Oh, yes—a little. Yes—very well," cried Miss Deane, contradicting herself.

"Anna, my dear, pray come here!"

"Yes, aunt, directly.—But, tell me quickly, is he very much hurt?"

"Very gravely, as far as I can tell after so slight an examination."

"He will not die?" she cried, with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I hope not. I will do my best to save him."

"Yes, yes; of course. But we must not waste time. Sir, he once saved my life. Oh, pray, pray make haste!"

"Yes. Forward, my lads!"

"But where are you taking him?"

"To the nearest inn."

"Oh, no—no—no!" she cried. "He ought to be taken to where he will be properly attended."

"Yes; but it is impossible for the men to carry him all the way to Ratcham. If you would drive on and give notice at the barracks, they would send their ambulance and take him at once to the hospital."

"The hospital?" said the girl piteously.

"What a fool I am!" thought the young doctor, whose sympathies were aroused by this great display of interest; "I am throwing away an interesting patient."

"Anna, my dear, this is very dreadful!" cried Miss Deane, senior. "Let us drive on at once!"

"Yes, aunt dear—no, aunt dear! I know!" she cried excitedly. "The men could lay that wooden thing upon the seats of the carriage, and he could be driven gently right into the town."

"Anna!"

"Hush, aunt, pray!" cried the girl decisively. "Do you not see it is a case of life and death? Now, doctor, move him at once! Aunt, come down out of the carriage!"

Miss Deane, senior, uttered an indignant sob, and descended into the dusty road. Then she not only made a virtue of necessity, but felt her own sympathies aroused.

"I wish I were a soldier and had shot myself," thought the doctor, as he directed the men, and had the hurdle carefully lifted into the waggonette, where, with a little management, it rode securely enough, while the girl watched every step of the proceedings, with her fingers twitching as if she longed to help.

"But you?" said the doctor now.

"Oh, never mind us; we can walk," said Miss Deane; and her aunt suppressed a groan.

"But it is a long distance," said the doctor.

"Don't talk of us when that poor lad may be dying," she cried. "You must ride with him and watch him."

"Yes, and send my chaise back," said the doctor eagerly. "Or—one moment; this would be better, if you would not mind riding on the box."

"Oh, pray, pray think of him!"

"I am thinking of him—and of you," said the doctor firmly. "We will not waste time. Let me help you up, and then I can drive this lady in my chaise and keep close by and have an eye to my patient as we go."

Anna Deane needed no assistance. She sprang up beside the driver, while her aunt was helped into the chaise. Then a thought struck her, and, taking out her purse, she emptied it into her hand, and beckoned to Joey, who came up, followed by Smiler, whose face had never looked so pleasantly full of admiration before.

"Will you pay all the men? Share it, please," she whispered. "Thank you, thank you so very much for what you've all done!"

The party of labourers followed till they had passed the little roadside inn, where they stopped and stood watching till chaise and waggonette had passed a corner of the road.

Then Joey turned to his companions, and opened his hand to count over the coins.

"There's four-and-twenty, Smiler," he said.

"And there's eight on us," said Smiler.

"And eight into twenty-four goes three times," said the man who left school last, amidst a murmur of satisfaction.

"Eight shillin's apiece," said Smiler.

"Get along with you," cried Joey. "Three shillin's apiece. Hands out, boys."

Seven hard palms were extended to him instantly, the coins counted into them, and Joey looked round.

"Before we can get to work again, boys, it'll be nigh time to leave off."

"Ay," was chorussed.

"There's a drop of yale nigh at hand, we're all dry and we've yearned it, so I says let's have one drink and then talk about it as we goes back."

"And so says all you," cried Smiler.

But they did not in words, only in acts; so that the aphides left on the hops enjoyed a few more leaves of life.

Chapter Forty.

Jerry lets out the Cat.

That night, after the mess dinner, Jerry, when seeing about the coffee for his master, had a note given to him to take into the room, and this he handed to the lieutenant, who flushed a little as he recognised the hand, and, disregarding the smiles of those nearest to him, he read, hastily written:—

"Pray come at once! Aunt and I were out driving, and we found poor Smithson. We brought him here. He is wounded, and dying. I know no more."

"Anna."

The lieutenant sprang up excitedly, and strode to the colonel's side, giving him the note to read.

"Poor boy!" cried the colonel. "Then he did not desert. I'm glad of that. Doctor, Smithson is found. He is, it seems, badly hurt."

"Bless my soul!" cried the doctor.

"Yes. Will you go on with Lacey at once, and—My good fellow, are you mad?"

"Yes, sir, a'most," cried Jerry, whose appearance and action justified the colonel's question, for he had suddenly seized the old officer's arm and made a snatch at the note.

"Stand back, sir! Leave the room at once! Here, turn this scoundrel out."

"Keep off, or I'll do you a mischief," roared Jerry, as two of the men sprang at him, and they shrank from his menacing gesture. "Here, Mr Lacey, Colonel, I want to know—I will know—if S'Richard's hurt—"

"Sir Richard! The man's drunk," cried the colonel.

"No, I ain't; but it's enough to make me," roared Jerry. "I am drunk now with what you gents call indignation. If S'Richard's hurt, it's foul play, and it's that black-hearted, cheating, gambling hound as done it. Keep back!—d'yer hear? It's all over now. It's the cat out of the bag, and no mistake!"

"One moment, colonel," cried Lacey firmly. "Brigley never drinks.—Look here, my man, you said foul play. Do you know who was likely to injure Smithson?"

"Smithson!" cried Jerry in contemptuous tones. "I don't care; I will speak now. Smithson—do I know? Yes, sir, I do; and I ought to have spoke before, when he was missing first."

"Then speak out," said Lacey, and the angry frown upon the colonel's face began to change to a look of interest. "Who is the scoundrel that had a grudge against Smithson?"

"Tell you he ain't no Smithson!" roared Jerry, bringing his fist down upon the table and making the glasses jump and one fall to the floor with a crash. "He made me swear I wouldn't speak;

but I will now. He's no Smithson. He's Sir Richard Frayne, Baronet, and the man as hurt him is his black-hearted cousin Mark, as calls himself 'Sir.' Him of the 310th."

"Stop, my man," cried the colonel. "This is a terribly serious charge to make against an officer and a gentleman."

"Officer!" cried Jerry, who was boiling over with hysterical excitement; "he deserves to have his uniform stripped off his back. Gentleman! as borrowed money on bills, and forged Sir Richard's name; said he didn't; and made the poor feller go off, leave everything, and come here and 'list."

"You are too excited, my man," said the colonel. "If all this is true—"

"True, sir? Bring me face to face with him—no: don't; for if he's killed that poor dear lad, I shall be hung for him as sure as I'm a man."

"Brigley," said the colonel, "you will be brought face to face with Sir Mark—"

"Mark—no *Sir*," cried Jerry hotly.

"Silence, man. You will be brought face to face with the officer you accuse. Meanwhile, you do not leave the barracks. You are under arrest."

"No, sir; pray, sir—Colonel, don't say that. Let me go and see him," cried Jerry, with the tears now streaming down his cheeks. "Mr Lacey, sir, say a word for me to the colonel. I must go to Sir Richard. If you shut me up—I can't help it, even if you shoot me for it—I shall desert."

"Silence, sir!"

"I beg pardon, sir," said Lacey; "the man is over-excited. I will be answerable for him, if you will let him come with me."

The colonel nodded his consent.

"What he says is true," continued Lacey, flushing now. "It must be. There have been so many things to prove that Smithson—"

"S'Richard, sir," cried Jerry.

"Well, that the young man we are going to see is a gentleman. I believe it all, Colonel; for, to my sorrow, I know Mark Frayne is little better than a sharper and a cheat."

"Mind what you are saying, Mr Lacey," cried the colonel sternly.

"I can prove my words, sir," said Lacey firmly.

"Go on, and see what is the matter," said the colonel. "Gentlemen, will you excuse me? Major, will you come to my quarters? I should like a word."

Lacey, the doctor, and Jerry went off at once, and ten minutes later they were at the bedside of Richard Frayne, who was slowly recovering after the young doctor's bandaging, and was talking wildly, but with sufficient coherence about the scene among the hops to let his hearers grasp the fact that this was no attempt at suicide, but a would-be murderer's deed.

The colonel and major left the barracks some time later, and were driven up to the quarters of the colonel of the 310th, who looked surprised at the visit, but said *en passant*—

"I have just heard that your missing bandsman has been found. Suicide, I suppose?"

"Or attempted murder!" said the colonel gravely. "We have come about that."

He related what had taken place, and the colonel of the 310th smiled.

"I have heard of romances," he said quietly. "Excuse me."

He touched the bell, and, upon a servant appearing, said—

"Go to Sir Mark Frayne's quarters, and ask him, with my compliments, to be good enough to step here. *Audi alteram partem*, gentlemen. You have an impostor in your band."

"We shall see."

Five minutes later the servant returned.

"Well?"

"Sir Mark Frayne left the mess-table, sir, when the news came of that man being found in the hop-field, and went to lie down,

sir; but his man says he went out about a quarter of an hour after *in mufti*, sir, and with a little Gladstone bag. Sergeant at the station, sir—provost—saw him leave by the up train at eight."

"That will do," said his master, and the colonel and the major rose to go.

"Looks bad, gentlemen," continued the colonel of the 310th. "A nasty scandal to have in one's corps!"

"Yes; but I don't think we want any more confirmation. That Gladstone bag and the train are enough."

"And if he had been a gentleman," said the major hotly, "he would have had the door of his quarters locked."

"How will it all end?" muttered the colonel. "Ah, well! there are black sheep in every flock, even if they hide their wool under our uniform."

Chapter Forty One.

"Halt!"

"Why, it was plain enough," said Jerry, one day as he sat by Richard's bed. "He'd made all his plans and led you on out there on purpose."

"Nonsense, man!"

"Ah, you may call it nonsense, if you like, because you don't see through it now no more than you did then."

"Of course I don't. When once you take a dislike to a man, you see nothing but evil in him. You invent things."

"Oh, do I!" cried Jerry. "Never mind. I couldn't invent so much wickedness as he's got in him, if I tried all night. Now, just let me ask you two or three questions."

"Go on then," said Dick, wearily.

"Here goes then. You know your cousin to be in the habit of going out grassing and taking walks up Constitution Hill for training himself?"

"Well, no, Jerry, I never did."

"Never found him fond o' buttercups and daisies, or prospects and views and that sort o' thing?"

"No."

"Nor yet taking six or seven or eight-mile walks to get himself a appetite?"

"Never."

"Then don't it seem a little strange as he should have done it that day and walked on and on, and never once made out that you were close behind him all the time?"

"It did seem strange to me once or twice. In fact, I felt pretty certain that he saw me."

"Oh, no; not likely," said Jerry, with a derisive grin. "He's too nice and innocent a young gentleman as to think that sooner or later you'd be making him give up the title and the money. He wasn't likely to say to himself, 'I'll walk right away into the loneliest place I can find, and coax him on and on till I get him where there's not a soul likely to be about, right down in one of the hop-gardens.' He wouldn't ever dream o' taking a loaded revolver with him and shoot you, so as to be able to enter to the property and be Sir Mark—not him!"

Dick remained silent, but his fingers were tearing impatiently at the bed-clothes.

"He wouldn't say to himself, 'I'll delude him down into a place like that and give him one pill.' And no one would ever say he was a likely gentleman to think of sticking the pistol in your hand so as to make it seem, when you were found by the hop-pickers, that you had done it yourself."

Dick drew a long deep breath, and Jerry went on.

"I'm getting too wicked altogether. Soldiering's poisoning my morals—there's no mistake about it. You see how I get thinking all kinds of bad about as mild and pleasant a gentleman as ever was born to be a comfort to people."

"Hold your tongue!" said Dick hoarsely. "Look here, Jerry, you don't think it possible that my cousin could have planned all that?"

"Think it possible!" cried Jerry contemptuously; "why, I'm sure of it. He was getting desperate; and how you could go on looking at it all in such a hinnercent way caps me. Why, a child could see through it all, and so could you, only you wouldn't. You knew it was just as I said, now didn't you?"

"I tried not to, Jerry, but it would take that shape."

"Of course it would, because there was no other shape for it to take. Officers wear swords, but they don't go out walking in plain clothes with six-shooters in their pockets, to take aim at their cousins in lonely places. Well, he made a mistake this time, and so he'll find."

But Mark Frayne was not heard of again for years, when someone brought news of having seen him far up the country in Queensland; but it might only have been a rumour, after all.

This was long after Sir Richard Frayne's promotion to captain in the regiment which he joined in India; for when he had fully recovered from the wound which brought him within an inch of death—the fever caused by the exposure playing its part—he went through a course of study and received his commission. While he remained in England, many were the pleasant weeks he spent with his friends the Laceys, and many the poorly-played duets that followed on the flutes.

There was no difficulty about the resumption of the title, and though the estate had been sorely plundered by the reckless spendthrift and gambler who had held it for a time, it soon began to recover in careful hands; while, as to Lacey, his losses were balanced by a heavy legacy just before he married, when he looked as handsome and easy-going as ever; and so he remained until stirred to action, as he subsequently was, when in Africa, upon more than one occasion. Then he proved a tough customer to have to deal with.

"And so you will not stay with Captain Lacey, Jerry?" said Sir Richard one day.

"No, S'Richard. I'd do anything for him, sir; and, as for his dear lady, she knows as I'd be her slave, but I seem to belong to you, sir, and, as you're going out to Indy, I feel as if I must go too, and so I volunteers."

Jerry did go, and nursed his master after wounds received in struggles with the Hill Tribes, and, after fever, too; but never was Sir Richard Frayne so near death as upon that day when he was borne back to Ratcham upon a hurdle and the truth came out.

"Ah!" Jerry used to mutter sometimes over his pipe, "that was a narrow squeak. But what I say is, there's worse lives than a soldier's, so three cheers for The Queen's Scarlet."

The End.
